

JANUARY
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AND

ADVENTURES



REST IN AGONY!

By

IVAR JORGENSEN

WHAT EVIL SECRET MADE HIS DEATH A LIVING HORROR?

STORY BY IVAR JORGENSEN
ILLUSTRATED BY ALAN KIRK



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All Stories Complete

REST IN AGONY (Novel—32,000) by Ivar Jorgensen 8

Illustrated by Ed Emaler

Houdini promised to come back from his grave. As far as most of us know, he failed. But Uncle Ambrose did come back—and he brought some friends with him.

WRESTLERS ARE REVOLTING! (Novelette—10,000) by Geoff St. Reynard 18

Illustrated by Tom Beechem

Bringing order out of chaos is one of society's basic rules. But Johnny Bell had to upset the orderly foundations of his country—or watch it destroyed.

THE SECRET OF GALLOW'S HILL (Short—4,500) by Paul W. Fairman 26

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

Spye was sentenced and the soldiers strung him up for spying. But then the British found that longer than the arm of the law was the limb of the tree.

WHEN GREED STEPS IN . . . (Short-short—2,375) by F. G. Royer 36

Illustrated by Tom Beechem

Sometimes it doesn't pay to be successful. Look at Kennedy—when he became the richest man on Cepheid, he automatically became the poorest man on Earth.

SATELLITE OF DESTRUCTION (Novelette—14,000) by Bart S. Lister 44

Illustrated by Leo Ramon Summers

Inside this tiny whirling asteroid lived the nations of another universe—
at war! It was up to Earth to bring them to peace—or fall into pieces. . .

Front cover painting by Ed Valkunsky, suggested by
a scene from "Rest in Agony"

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

OUR LEAD story this month is an experiment—and you're the judge. This is an extreme story—in every respect. When Jorgensen first submitted it to us, our reactions to it were very mixed—too much fantasy, too weird, too erotic, too much science. We were just full of criticisms.

BUT ONE thing stood out: not one of our staff could put the manuscript down until he'd finished reading it. Each one's attention was glued to the very end. Written in the rhythmic nostalgic style of Jorgensen, "Rest In Agony" has a power and a beauty which is sweeping.

SO—WE'RE taking a chance on it. It's up to you. Do you want more of this type of story? Or would you prefer Jorgensen to stick to the kind of thing he's been doing for us up to now?

A VIENNESE medical researcher has recently been publishing a series of case histories about the strange borderline between human life and death, and some of his accounts are as grim and as macabre as the weirdest of weird fiction. A person is usually pronounced dead when pulse-beat, heart-beat, and breathing have ceased, and many a certificate of death has been made out by the examining doctor on this basis. But an investigation into the results of artificial respiration and other standardized methods of resuscitation, show that in many cases these criteria are definitely inadequate.

THIS FACT is particularly true of two forms of death: death by electric shock (accidental) and death by poison (of the sleeping-pill variety). In both cases, voluminous records show that where artificial respiration was applied to such victims, what originally passed for death was actually a comatose condition approximating suspended animation, from which the victims later were aroused with complete success.

NUMEROUS instances involving workmen around high-voltage electricity confirm this. Many cases taken from records and personal observation lead the doctor to believe that electric shock is a pseudo-killer. Very often victims have absorbed jolts ranging from fifty to ten thousand volts, both D.C. and A.C. and have been pronounced dead, only to be "brought back" to life by artificial-respiration enthusiasts whose ceaseless strivings finally met with success.

TODAY, CASES of burial alive are rare, but there remain from the past grisly records of actual incidents in which, just before burial, the "subject" protested vigorously. Nevertheless, despite the fact that things of this sort are rare, it's quite possible that many people have gone to their death simply because artificial respiration was not applied for a long enough time. In addition, the misapplication of artificial respiration can also cause death, and the workers who use the technique must be very well trained. Great effort is being made to develop pulsometer apparatus and chemical and medical resuscitants which will absolutely guarantee the revival of any victim of shock capable of being revived. It's about time, too. How many ghosts are crying from the grave?...LES



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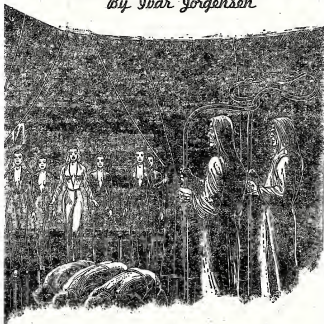


The figure slowly rose up from the flames, and blessed the orgy which was about to begin

What's the reward for a man who lives
the good clean life? It could be . . .

REST IN AGONY!

By Ivar Jorgensen



MY UNCLE died in agony.

It was a warm June evening—not made for death but for being born and living. The trees were green and there was the scent of flowers and new-cut grass. But all the

freshness and newness did not help my uncle, who lay dying in his bed that warm June night.

I sat in the yard swing in the darkness—that I remember—with my fists doubled and my body tense against the

low moaning and the aura of pain emanating from the big white house.

And the question ever-present in my mind. Why? Why this suffering? Why this sentence of unending agony passed upon a man who had been gentle, kind, and good all his life? What price decency and the upright life with this the reward? What good was anything?

A shadow loomed and Lisa was standing by the swing. She sat down. Her shoulder touched mine and she shivered—as though the air were filled with the desolation of winter rather than the promise of spring.

"Hal."

"Yes?"

She really had nothing to say. She only wanted the comfort of being close to someone and speaking a name:

"It's pretty bad," I said. Words without meaning.

"It's—awful."

Above us, a square yellow eye gleamed from the bedroom.

"Who's in there now?"

"Dad. Mother. Doc Simpson."

"Is he any better?"

"Worse. The drugs are wearing off."

"I can't understand it. I just can't understand. How could a man—"

A scream chilling the air. The yellow eye seemed to quiver and blink. Lisa's hand suddenly in mine. A kitten-whimper close to my shoulder. Otherwise it had to be ignored—the scream. Too horrible to be given the dignity of acknowledgement:

"—could a man go down so fast."

Lisa was crying. I put my arm around her shoulders and drew her close to me. She was eighteen, but now only a kid with no years at all behind her. A kid—frightened, bewildered, scared.

I was twenty-one. My job to give her courage. I wondered about it. How do you give somebody courage when you haven't got any yourself?

A labored moan from above floating on the air along with the fragrance of flowers.

"Take it easy, kid. Take it easy."

Another shadow. A white sweat-shirt gleaming. Tennis shoes kicking at the sod. Mark Davis—wanting to be there—wondering if he belonged.

I was glad he'd come over. Maybe the boy friend could do more for Lisa than the brother. I moved my arm. Mark sat down and took Lisa's hand.

"Is he any better?"

"A little maybe."

"I won't stay. I just wanted to ask."

"Stick around," I said.

Lisa asked him without words—with the pressure of her hands.

So we sat there, the three of us, eager only for life but getting acquainted with death on a sweet spring night.

And death came. Drifting in the window maybe, or—tired of watching the agony—reaching out a hand to stop it.

The light on the second floor went out. The porch door sounded and there was Dad's voice: "It's all over. Uncle Amby has passed on. Say a prayer for him."

We had no words to fill the gap.

"Not that he'll need it." Dad's resentment at the suffering was mirrored in the defiance of his tone. "Not that he'll need it, but say a prayer, anyhow."

Mark was taking care of Lisa. Her sobs were muffled in his sweat-shirt.

I said a prayer, but it was really a curse—a sacrilege. A whisper of defiance. "*Damn nice of you to let him out of it. Were you getting bored?*"

I stared up at the dark window. It looked empty, exhausted. Washed clean by agony and death. Uncle Amby was dead.

HIS PICTURE was in the morning paper—the one taken three years

before when he'd given the gymnasium to the high school—and I was surprised at seeing how handsome he was. In even the short, swift time of his decline, I'd forgotten.

There were a good many fine and respectful words in the write-up. Words like—*friends without number—humanitarian—a day of mourning for our town.*

Lisa and I were in the living room after breakfast, reading the paper, when Dad looked in and said, "I'd like you two to come into the study." He went back down the hall without waiting for us.

Uncle Amby's body had been taken down to West's Funeral Home, and all evidences of his sickness and death had vanished. All except the big emptiness in our hearts at the knowledge he was gone forever.

We went into the study and Lisa and I sat down on the lounge on either side of Mother. Her eyes were red from weeping, but she was entirely in control of her emotions. She smiled at us but said nothing.

Dad was seated at his desk, but when we came in he got up and began pacing the floor. He continued to pace up and down as he talked.

"There are some things you should know about your Uncle Ambrose," he said. "Things that—"

Mother held out a hand. "Carl—
are you sure you should tell them? Do you think it necessary?"

Father put on that stubborn look we knew so well. "Please, Helen. They aren't children any more. They must know the truth."

Mother sighed and said nothing more.

"No man," Dad went on, "ever had a finer brother-in-law than Ambrose Whiting. There was much that you two knew about him for which you respected and loved him. But there was

even more you didn't know."

He stopped pacing and took a sheet of note paper from the desk. "I have not been nearly as successful as you have been led to believe."

Again Mother raised her hand. "Carl—please. Ambrose wouldn't have wanted you to tell them—"

"They've got to know, Helen. They've got to know what Ambrose Whiting really did for us." He went back into the narrative tone: "Your Uncle Ambrose bought this house," Father said. "I could never have afforded it on an accountant's salary. He set up funds to send you to college. Many times I tried to refuse his money and generosity, but always he used that stone-wall argument: What right had I to refuse benefits for my children? I couldn't ever smash down that argument, so you really owe your uncle more than you owe me."

DEEP SILENCE filled the room before Mother said, "That was so unnecessary, Carl. They didn't have to know—"

"I disagree. In death the man is entitled to the credit he would not take in life." Father laid down the paper and I could see he was relieved.

The revelations, while a surprise, did not stir me a great deal. Not that I was ungrateful, but all this was exactly what one would have expected from Uncle Amby.

"Your mother and I are going to the funeral parlor now," Dad said. "There are arrangements to be made."

"I'll go with you," Lisa said.

I stayed at home. Somehow, I didn't want to see him as he now would be. I wanted to remember him as he had been before—striding up the walk every Wednesday afternoon, returning from his weekly business trip. I wanted to think of him waving to us from

the cab that took him away every Saturday evening.

I watched Dad roll the car out of the drive and down the street. Then I went into the back yard and flopped down under a shade tree.

The next thing is a little hard to tell—even the part that's believable. It seems to me now that—lying there under the tree—a change came over me. That might not be true at all. Maybe I just feel that way looking back at it. Maybe there wasn't any change at all in me.

I remember that my mind had drifted far away, that the sound of the phone's ringing had finally brought it back. As I got to my feet, I had the impression the phone had been ringing for some time.

I ran into the house and this I do know: I stood with my hand an inch from the receiver and let the signal come three more times.

Then I picked up the receiver and said, "Hello."

"Hello." The voice was faint, hardly above a whisper.

"Who is this?"

"Don't you know?"

"I can't bear you very well."

"This is your Uncle Amby, Hal. Your Uncle Amby."

There should have been two natural reactions. Consternation and unbelief. I should have been shocked to the roots of my being. I wasn't. I should have suspected a grim, heartless, unforgivable practical joke. I had no such suspicion.

Only an odd numbness in my body—a lethargy in my mind as though it had suddenly come under the influence of a drug.

"You Uncle Amby, Hal."

"There's something wrong." It was my voice, but with very little of my mind directing it. "There's something badly mixed up here." Silly mouthings, but all I could think of.

"No, Hal. Not in the way you think. I'm sick, Hal. Very sick. I need your help. Will you help me, son?"

"Of course, Uncle Amby. What can I do for you?"

IT WAS AS though I'd become disembodied and stood there watching myself playing a part—speaking lines on a stage where I was both the actor at the telephone and the audience sitting out front criticizing the performance.

He's forgotten his lines—he just stands there saying nothing—this is a dramatic moment in the play and he should do something—but he just stands there mouthing words that mean nothing.

"I'll do anything I can, Uncle Amby."

The voice flared with emotion now—the same agony I'd felt the previous night spewed out of the phone, like an invisible stench and bling in the air.

"It isn't over, Hal. Pity me! It's just begun. You must help me, boy—help me—help..."

The whisper faded to a choking, a gasp. Then there was silence.

"Hello—hello—hello!"

"Hello." But not from the phone. A lazy voice at my elbow.

I hadn't seen him come into the hall. I whirled, still holding the receiver—and saw him—a slim, tired-looking young man wearing a gray fedora at a rather cocky angle, one shoulder slumped down as though his upper body were lounging on his hips.

"The door was open and I saw you standing here, so I came in."

I was normal again to the point of being short-tempered. "You were pretty quiet about it."

"I wear rubber heels. Did your party bang up?"

I put the receiver back into the

cradle. "What do you want? Who are you?"

"Payson," he said lazily. "Hugh Payson of the *Telegram*. I write a column. Maybe you've read it—*The Tenth Inning*?"

"Yes—sure. You're a sports reporter."

"I like columnist better," he grinned. "It's more dignified. But let it go."

"Why did you come here?"

He moved out of the hall and onto the front porch. He did it very casually—made almost an art of it—drawing me along after him until he dropped down on the top step and seemed grateful at taking the weight off his hips.

"Sit down—sit down," he invited. "I heard your uncle died. Ambrose Whiting. He was your uncle, wasn't he?"

I resented being invited to sit down on my own porch. That occurred to me after I was seated beside him. I let my hostility show in my voice. "Yes. Ambrose Whiting was my uncle, and now he's dead. What's that got to do with sports?"

I DISCOVERED the grin was almost a facial characteristic. Either his face was built that way, or he'd grinned so much that the corners of his mouth were turned permanently upward.

"Nothing, son. Nothing at all."

"Then was my uncle a friend of yours?"

He gave this some thought. As he did so, my mind went back to the phone call. And it was as if the monstrosity of it only now dawned upon me. Uncle Amby lying cold in the funeral parlor. *Uncle Amby's voice coming agonized over the phone.*

"Well—I wouldn't say that exactly—" A sharp, quizzical glance. "Hey, kid—what's wrong? You seem to be out of this world."

"Ah—what? Oh—I'm sorry."

"Did he mean that much to you?"

"He meant a lot to all of us."

Hugh Payson appeared to be a very deliberate man. He gave unhurried thought to each separate statement that came into his ears. He slowly digested the last one and then said, "What was your uncle's business?"

"He traveled for a woolen company. He was a salesman."

Payson squinted at the top of a maple tree in the front yard. He seemed to be estimating its height. "Massasoit Fabrics Incorporated, 151 River Street, Williamsburg. Ever go down there with him?"

"No."

"Ever go down there by yourself?"

"No. I never did."

That lazy, analytical stare was biting into my eyes. "You should make the trip sometime."

"Listen here. You haven't told me what you want or why you came here. If it isn't important—"

"But it is. Very important."

"Then get it over with."

"You asked me if I was a friend of your uncle. I said I wasn't, but that doesn't mean I didn't know him. I knew him better than you do. You see, I made a study of him."

"I don't understand."

Without moving an eyelash, Hugh Payson seemed to speed up. Even his voice sounded more brisk without changing the lazy tone.

"I'm looking for a book," he said.

"What kind of a book?"

HE HELD out his fingers to form a vague rectangle. He studied the fingers as though he had limitless time. "A book about so gross. Maybe three or four by six inches. Black."

"What's the name of it?"

This appeared to stump him. A great deal of thought was required before he said, "It has no title, really."

I suppose you'd call it more of a diary than a book—in the strictest sense of the word. I only saw it once. Across the front, in gold letters, is printed: **THE BOOK OF AMBROSE.**"

"I don't know whether my uncle kept a diary or not, but is that what you're referring to?"

"Let's call it that." He got to his feet and allowed his shoulder to slump back into place. "Come on, kid. Let's look through your uncle's room and see if we can find that book."

I came up off the porch as though I'd been sitting on a hornet. "You're asking for a bust in the nose, mister!"

I meant it. I was never closer to hanging one on a man's jaw.

But Payson was either too thick to sense it, or he wasn't afraid. He laughed with what could have been a shade of embarrassment. "Guess I'm slipping. Out of practice, you might say. In the old days, when I was covering a news beat—"

"I think you'd better get out of here—quick."

"Did you ever hear of Margo Dillon?"

He threw it at me fast, maybe to keep me off balance. I kept my fists clenched and said I'd never heard of the name.

"I didn't think so. You ought to meet her sometime. She's quite a gal."

He'd taken three steps down the walk, so I couldn't tell him again to beat it. He was already going. He took another step and turned to face me.

And here was another Hugh Payson; a second man without any definable change coming over the other Hugh Payson I'd seen.

"If you find that book, kid—"

"I'm not even going to look for it."

"I would look for it if I were you. And if you find it—for heaven's sake don't let your mother or your sister get their hands on it."

He went out and got into a green roadster and drove away. I sat down on the step again and watched him drive out of sight.

I sat there for an hour, my mind in a hopeless mire of confusion. The phone call. What sort of insanity lay back of it? Could there be a person on earth so cruel, so utterly heartless, as to—?

I REFUSED to believe it and tried to relive the brief moments—tried to reconstruct the words and the tone. It had to be Uncle Amby's voice. No one could have imitated him so perfectly. No one could simulate agony with such fidelity. That's what I told myself, but I didn't necessarily believe it. I didn't believe anything. I only sat there with my mind whirling.

I thought again of Hugh Payson. At least he was real. He actually existed. His name appeared every day on the sports page of the local newspaper together with a small picture of him.

But what had he wanted? Why had he come to our house inquiring about Uncle Amby? A book, he'd said. **THE BOOK OF AMBROSE.** What did he want of such a book even if it did exist? Why had he said that Lisa and Mother shouldn't see it?

There were no answers.

I thought of Hugh Payson and I tried to dislike him. He was that kind of a guy; one you automatically liked unless you made an effort not to.

I recalled the rest of it. The part about the Massasoit Company at 151 River Street. And with the thought came a sort of relief. Here, at least, was something which didn't have to remain a mystery, if such it was. I could go to Williamsburg. Two hours on the Interurban. I could go to River Street and walk into the offices of the company Uncle Amby had worked for.

A sudden feeling of elation spring-

ing from something to take hold of—to get a grip on. I'd go down to Williamsburg and knock all this shadow stuff out with a little realism—the sight of a good solid company doing a quiet, unspectacular business. That would do it.

I felt better.

IT WAS one of the biggest funerals our town had ever seen. The church was packed, and there were over forty cars in the procession.

There were about twenty relatives—mostly distant—because Mother and Uncle Ambrose had been the only child in that branch of the family.

The cemetery finally, and it all went off beautifully, Mr. West handling everything. There wasn't a hitch from the beginning to the end. After the last services, people began drifting back to their cars in the quiet way of folks at funerals. We were the last to leave, or so I thought. But while we were waiting for our car, I looked around and saw a lone woman standing by the grave.

She wasn't dressed in mourning but you hardly noticed that because her dress—light blue—was in good taste; expensive-looking. And her hat and blue veil were not "flippity", as Dad usually described women's hats.

She stood motionless, looking down into the grave, and her veil did not hide her features. I looked at her, turned away, then snapped back and did a double take.

She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

But it was more than beauty somehow; call it color, glamor, personality—anything you want—she had it. I was gawking like a school boy—taking in her shapely ankles, the trim, perfect figure; but most of all, the madonna-like beauty of her face.

It seemed to me that every eye in the cemetery should have been on her.

Yet she stood quite alone, and maybe the other men had had more of a sense of decorum or knew better how to conduct themselves at a funeral than I. At any rate, no one paid any attention to her. She was entirely alone.

I was standing behind Lisa and the folks, a little back. A hand touched my shoulder. I looked up—away from the girl by the grave—and found Hugh Payson's penetrating eyes upon me.

"What do you think of her?"

It was as though I'd been caught doing something of which I should be ashamed—looking at her. Payson had me off balance again.

"I..."

"Don't give it a thought. She's worth looking at. Her name's Margo Dillon."

"That's the name you asked me—"

"Uh-huh. Maybe you'll meet the lady some day. Be seeing you."

He wandered off, following an apparently aimless path to the gate. Our car pulled up at that moment and a chauffeur opened the door. As we rolled slowly away, I looked back to see the girl in blue standing motionless, staring fixedly down into the grave.

And that strange, empty feeling came over me again, as though I stood in a motionless place right in the heart of a hurricane. The same feeling I'd had as I'd walked in to answer the telephone on the day after Uncle Ambry's death.

I turned back in my seat and a little shiver ran up my spine. As we drove away, I said a parting prayer for Uncle Ambry.

THAT NIGHT I heard—in passing—a snatch of conversation between Dad and Mother.

"...necessary to go through his things."

"Not for a while, Carl. I couldn't bear to—"

"I know. We'll forget about it for a few days; let you get your bearings again."

That was all, but somehow it made me think of the book to which Payson had referred. Black, with THE BOOK OF AMBROSE in gold on its cover. I remembered what he'd said about not letting Mother or Lisa see it.

I kept on thinking about it and gradually justified—in my own mind—the thought of going to his room and looking for it. The justification was false, of course. I had no business snooping.

But that night, after the house was quiet, I went down the hall in my slippers and let myself into his room. I stood looking at the bed for a while, remembering how he'd died there. It was made up again now—clean, white—purged of all sickness and agony.

Again I remembered the phone call. A little time having passed, I could view the episode with more sanity. A practical joke, of course. Not funny, but then that term covers a broad area. Any cruel, heartless act of an unbalanced mind is termed a practical joke. But what unbalanced mind had devised that one? My thoughts turned back to the job in hand. Uncle Amby had never unpacked his suitcase. Because of his weekly trips, it was simpler to live out of the bag rather than to continually transfer his personal belongings from dresser drawers and back again.

He used a large, expensive pigskin bag that now stood against the wall at the end of the bed. I laid it on its side and tried the snap mechanism. The bag was locked.

I went to the closet, opened the door and looked over Uncle Amby's suits hanging in a neat row on the hanger rod. There were an even dozen. I hadn't realized he'd owned so many. All expensive; the finest tailoring; the best money could buy.

I remembered he'd worn a blue

serge that last morning when he collapsed at the breakfast table. There were three of these. The pockets of the first were entirely empty.

BUT IN the inner jacket pocket of the second one was a small book.

It wasn't the book I was after. This one had a red cover, the kind commonly used for names and addresses. I sat down on the bed and thumbed through its pages.

It was the strangest book I'd ever seen. It contained names and addresses, all right—and comments after some of the names. But they were people I had never heard of, wouldn't have been able to locate even if I knew who they were.

A few examples:

Ecstasy Danvers, House by the Devil's Bend—A favored one.

Curse Dillon, The Place of Pain—The dangerous one.

Vandal James, The Sign of the Bull—Satan's playmate.

Amora Cortwright, House of Smothering Darkness—Goddess of dark waters.

And many more. Page after page of these strange wild names and weird impossible places. Each one followed by a cryptic comment that left me more baffled than before.

I sat for a long time with the book in my hands—long after I'd stopped turning the pages. It made no sense whatever. A mad illogical thing, that address book. It told me nothing, but still it opened a vast new vista to my bewildered mind.

Senseless as it was, paradoxically it gave sense to some of the things which had been happening. It didn't explain them; rather it justified them by being a mad companion piece, a thing as senseless as all the rest.

I forced my mind to work again as I sat staring at the book. What to do with it? Put it back to be discov-

ered by my parents? Somehow, I didn't want that to happen. I slipped the book into my pocket, got up, walked to the suitcase.

Again I remembered I had no key. But instead of returning to the closet, I went to the dresser. Uncle Amby's possessions had no doubt been placed in a drawer.

The keys were there, right where whoever undressed Uncle Amby had put them. The keys, together with his wallet, handkerchief, and cigarette lighter.

But no—not his handkerchief. Someone else's. In its corner were the initials "S. R." I passed this with scarcely a thought. At this point, the wrong initials hardly seemed of great importance.

There were nine keys on the ring, but I had no trouble locating the one that opened the suitcase. I knelt down and inserted the key. I turned it.

With the snapping of the lock, there came simultaneously the sound of the doorknob turning. The door was pushed open and Lisa whispered, "Hal! What on earth are you doing?"

WE HAD been sitting in the room for a long time. I didn't know the hour, but it must have been very late. My throat was dry from talking, but now Lisa had the whole picture, and nothing had been said by either of us for several minutes.

Lisa sat in the middle of the bed, her feet curled up under her. Her hair was drawn straight back and fastened in a bun. She had no makeup on, and she looked not eighteen at all, but like a very little girl. Only her firm, lovely mouth betrayed her young womanhood.

Suddenly I regretted telling her the story. I had no right to expose her to such perplexing and undecipherable things. I was ashamed.

She had been fingering through Uncle Amby's address book. She dropped

it on the bed, drew back her hands, pushed them into the sleeves of her robe.

"Hal."

"Yes?"

"I have a feeling about all this."

"Tell me."

"It's a little hard. Maybe it's mainly intuition and I won't be able to make myself clear, but—"

"Try anyhow."

"Well—I think that was Uncle Amby's voice you heard over the phone."

"Lisa! That's insane."

"I know, but—" She reached out and laid an impulsive band on my arm.

"Hal—did you ever stop to think how little we know of things? Of the world? We live here in a small town, protected by our friends and family—moving in our little orbits of respectability—"

I had to laugh. "Golly, Sprat! What big words you use!"

"Hal! I'm serious. All this is very serious."

"I'm sorry—go on."

"Because we're young, maybe—and—well, because we jitterbug and guzzle cokes and keep the juke box jumping, people forget that we can think—that we have minds—maybe better minds than some adults who've gotten into a groove and couldn't get out if they wanted to."

"You don't have to put up a defense. I know you've read half the books in the public library. Go ahead and say what you have to say. I won't laugh."

And that was the truth. After what had happened, who was I to laugh at anything Lisa said? "Tell me in plain words—how could I hear Uncle Amby's voice over the phone when we both know he was already dead?"

"I can't answer that, but I have a feeling we'll find out. I'm beginning to believe Uncle Amby was two men, Hal. I think he was a dual personality—a man living two lives. One was here with us—solid, respectable; un-

spectacular. The other—"

"Yes? What about the other?"

"Hal—I think it was so incredibly evil that—it frightens me."

LISA HAD put into words the vague, half-formed impressions I'd been fearfully harboring in my own mind—things I hadn't even dared put into a thought-pattern.

I didn't answer her and she went on: "So many things can be questioned now—things it never before occurred to us to question. For instance, Uncle Ambrose's unvarying routine—three days at home—four days away. Week after week—month after month—year after year."

"Maybe it's all right to be suspicious now, but we can go too far and start questioning perfectly logical details. Uncle Amby was a traveling man. A salesman, and a good one."

"How do we know he was a traveling man?"

"Why—he told us he was. We—we took it for granted."

"That's right. We took it for granted because we had no reason to do otherwise."

Lisa was surprising me no end. This wasn't the good-natured scatterbrain of a sister I'd been used to. She could think when the occasion for thinking arose. She could reason. She had a hard, analytical brain and now it was beginning to show. I'd fully expected her to cringe from my revelations. But she'd taken the play away from me and was going ahead.

"But things are different now, Hal. Why shouldn't we question Uncle Amby's routine? It's certainly highly suspicious."

I agreed with a nod.

"And there are other things we have a right to wonder about, too."

I asked her what they were.

"Uncle Ambrose was too good to us."

"That's a hot one."

"I know—maybe it sounds like ingratitude—as though I'm turning against him. But that isn't true. I'm just trying to reason things out."

"Go ahead and reason."

"All right. He brought us presents every time he came home—expensive clothes—all kinds of gifts."

"And we never turned them down."

"Of course we didn't. He gave us spending money and after he died we found out he was paying for our education—that he'd even bought this house."

"Are you trying to make a point?"

"You're darned right I am. Uncle Amby was never what you'd call an affectionate man. I never had the feeling either of us was personally attractive to him. As a matter of fact, I often had the feeling he was annoyed when we hung around him too much. In all the time I knew him, he kissed me just once—on my thirteenth birthday."

"Look! Cut it out! You're making me feel wormy—turning on the dead after they're gone. How low can we get?"

"Stop being juvenile, Hal. Either that, or we'll walk in and turn this whole thing over to Mother and Dad. If you can't think as an adult, you've no right to wrestle with adult problems."

AGAIN I was surprised. Lisa saying this? My little sister? "Look who grew up overnight!"

A stiffness came into Lisa's lips. A warning.

"Okay—okay. Go on with what you were saying."

What with new thoughts boiling around in her mind, she'd already forgotten her annoyance. "Hal, did you ever get the feeling Uncle Ambrose was—well, a little feverish in his generosity toward us?"

I didn't quite get it, and Lisa began to clarify.

"Just suppose a man spent part of his life doing evil things—things he was mortally ashamed of. Suppose he didn't want to stop doing them—or couldn't. But suppose this man had a conscience that demanded some satisfaction. So, in order to save his conscience and get a little sleep, this man lavished gifts upon those closest to him—tried to atone with his right hand for the evil his left was clutching."

"Pure poetry and a perfect cliché," I said, "but I get the idea and maybe I can add something. Let's suppose this man had no conscience but needed a front of respectability to hide behind. He needed respectable people around him to keep away any suspicions of a hidden life. Wouldn't it be logical for him to buy his way in? Put aside generosity and love for us, what did Uncle Amby really do? He bought his way solidly into our household. He made himself one of us in the most logical way—by putting us under obligation."

We'd been doing a lot of talking and had really solved nothing. The talk died out and we sat in silence. Far away, at the edge of town in some swamp, I could hear frogs croaking. I glanced at Lisa, her eyes coming around to meet mine at the same moment.

And the same little chill ran up our spines to make us shiver in unison.

Lisa said, "Hal—we can't let this thing drop. We've got to look further into it."

"I don't think that's for us to say. We aren't running the show. We can't do anything more with what we have. If nothing else happens, we'll just wonder about it for the rest of our lives."

"We can go to Williamsburg and find Uncle Amby's company."

"Sure we can, and we're certainly going to be disappointed when the re-

ceptionist snaps her gum and asks us who we want to see."

"And what about Margo Dillon, the girl Hugh Payson mentioned?"

"All right, suppose we find her, which we probably won't. What'll we say? Tell her our dead uncle called up for help, and then ask her what to do?"

"And the book, Hal. You didn't finish looking in the suitcase."

THAT WAS true. I'd only lifted the lid when Lisa had come in and started asking questions.

I went over and knelt down in front of it. Thank heaven Lisa stayed where she was, on the bed behind me.

There was a pile of shirts on top. I moved them to one side and found a pile of underwear. I moved that and found a dozen pairs of brand new socks. Under the socks there was nothing but the bottom of the suitcase.

I put them all back where they were and started on the other side. Handkerchiefs, shaving lotion, two razors, toilet articles. A pair of slacks neatly folded.

And a small black volume with THE BOOK OF AMBROSE done in gold leaf on the cover.

Leaving it still lying on the bottom of the suitcase, I snapped it open with my thumb and forefinger.

Lisa stirred on the bed. I couldn't see her, but I knew she was craning her neck. "What did you find? Anything?"

I dropped the slacks back into place; put back the toilet articles, the two razors, the shaving lotion, the handkerchiefs.

I closed the suitcase and got to my feet. I felt a little sick.

"Nope. Nothing of importance. We'd better get to bed now. We'll chew this over tomorrow."

I stretched and yawned and made a pretty good thing out of it. "Lord, it

must be three o'clock."

My yawn was contagious. Lisa got off a real one and we tiptoed out of the room.

I saw Lisa go into her own room and close the door. I went on down the hall and put a hand on the knob of my door, but didn't turn it. I counted to fifty.

Then I went back into Uncle Ambrose's room and got the book out of his suitcase. I wrapped it in one of the handkerchiefs and then went downstairs and out the back door. There was enough light to see a spade standing among the other tools against the house. I took the spade and went to the end of the garden and dug a hole and buried THE BOOK OF AMBROSE.

After patting the earth down and putting back the piece of sod I'd cut out, I went back to my room and went to bed.

Finally I dropped off to sleep, but it couldn't have been more than a few minutes before a dream-sound began plaguing my ears. The buzz-buzz-buzz of an annoying insect.

Suddenly I was wide awake and realizing it was neither a dream nor an insect, but reality—the telephone ringing downstairs.

I never got out of bed and into the hall faster in my life. But I was too late. Dad was already downstairs, and as I opened the door I heard him grumbling as he lifted the receiver off the stand.

"Hello."

Lisa had come out into the hall and was standing by her door in pajamas, hugging her shoulders as though against the cold.

"Hello—hello—hello!"

I looked at Lisa. Her round eyes were staring back at me. Her face was white in the dimness.

"Operator. Someone rang this phone."

"It was so dead quiet we could hear the crackle of the operator's reply there in the upper hall.

"I'm sorry, sir. It must have been a mistake. There is no one on the line."

I thought Lisa grew even more pale as Dad slammed down the receiver. He went past me growling: "Must have been a wrong number. Get back to bed, you two."

I went into my room and closed the door.

I was a long time in getting to sleep.

"I THINK S. R. stands for Satan's Representative," Hugh Payson said.

We were in a booth in Kramer's Bar down by the depot. I'd debated for quite a while before calling up Payson. That was after I'd read THE BOOK OF AMBROSE.

I hadn't wanted to read it. It had made me sick to start with—just that first flash I'd gotten of it in the suitcase when I'd thumbed through the pages and could almost hear Payson's parting advice: "*...for heaven's sake don't let your mother or your sister get their hands on it!*"

I looked up now, remembering again. "How did you know I had a sister?"

Pason lounged casually across from me. "I told you I'd made a study of Ambrose Whiting. So I know about his close relatives. Now, about that book—"

No—I hadn't wanted to read it. I'd spent the whole morning avoiding it—and avoiding Lisa, who had tried to corner me several times.

Around noon she nailed me on the back porch. "Hal, Mother and Dad are upstairs now. They're going through Uncle Amby's things. Do you think—?"

"I don't think they'll find anything. I don't believe he kept the book here. Don't worry."

I started to walk away.

"Hal."

"What?"

"That phone call last night. Could it have been another one from—?"

I didn't want her to say it. "How do I know? I'm no mind reader. The operator said it was a mistake."

"That's true, but—"

I was out of earshot now and the thought suddenly struck me of our un-discussed conspiracy—Lisa's and mine. Nothing had been said about keeping this affair from Mother and Dad; yet that was exactly what we intended to do. It was our joint resolution, and I wondered if it was right. Then I knew our reason for so doing. It was easily stated.

They wouldn't believe us.

It was as simple as that, but it still bothered me. Not for long, however. There were too many other weighty things to be mulled over.

THE BOOK OF AMBROSE.

I went out and walked up and down the alley for a while, kicking at the ashecan as I passed it and trying to twist the loose screws back into the gate hinge with my thumbnail.

If I'd been convinced this was the end—that the affair was over—that Uncle Ambrose was dead and buried forever—I'd have let the book rot in the ground where it was. But in my heart I felt as Lisa did. It wasn't the end. It was only the beginning.

FINALLY—after I'd gone in and got the screwdriver and fixed the gate—I went behind the bushes and dug up the book. I found a hidden spot behind the big lilac bush by the fence and sat down to read.

It took about an hour. Then I slammed the covers together and realized what an appropriate place I'd found to do the reading. Right by the alley where the smells from the garbage pails were the strongest. I buried

the thing again and took a long walk.

But I had to talk to somebody! I'd stumbled onto a crawling rotten thing that was too big for me to handle, and I had to talk to somebody.

As long as it couldn't be Lisa, there was only one party left. I called Hugh Payson at his paper and now we were sitting in a bar by the depot having a beer. I'd given it all to him, just as it happened.

"No," he repeated. "I don't think it was someone else's handkerchief. I think it belonged to Ambrose Whiting—the other Ambrose Whiting, that is."

"Satan's Representative. It's—it's unbelievable!"

"Any more so than the telephone call?"

"Well, that was—oh hell! A guy's brain can't wrap itself around just so much."

Payson had finished reading the address book and it was lying open on the table. He reached out very carefully and pushed it further away with the tip of his little finger. "What are you going to do with that?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Shall I burn it?"

"I think it would be a good idea."

"And what about the other one?"

He thought it over for a while. "I wish you'd give it to me."

"What would you do with it?"

He didn't answer directly. He looked at me as though he were killing time by counting the cells in my brain.

"Kid, even after reading that book, I still don't think you realize what it is. It's rotten, sure. But the rot and the filth is wider and deeper than you can possibly know. Those rituals Whiting wrote down aren't just fantasies out of some opium eater's dream. They're powerful and deadly. I'd rather see you playing with a bowl of nitroglycerine."

"You actually think there's something to devil worship?"

"How do you think it was possible for your uncle to contact you?"

"Wait a minute! You're as bad as Lisa—"

"I never met your sister, but I've got a hell of a lot of respect for her. She's nobody's fool, and she's got the priceless gift of believing her instincts. You'd do well to learn from her."

"Lisa couldn't know anything about evil such as this!"

"Of course not. But she was close to your uncle, and no matter how he covered up, she could instinctively see through him."

PAYSON emptied his beer glass.

"Hal, relative to your sister, I want to tell you something. You've been brushing up against devil worship—that's what this stuff amounts to—and it's time to recall some of the basic statements found in the Bible. Statements we're pretty much inclined to take as naive and impotent. But they aren't. You ask me why Lisa tilt the truth so unerringly. Kid, it's because the eyes of the pure in heart are the sharpest eyes in creation. Clever people can be fooled; smart men can be hoodwinked. But where rot such as this is concerned, the pure in heart can't be deceived."

He seemed a little embarrassed at his own words. "That's the way it is," he said. "You can take it or leave it."

"I can't do either. I'm bewildered and confused, and I never felt more stupid in my life. What am I going to do?"

"Drop it, kid. Drop it and let it lie."

"After your telling me that was really Uncle Amby on the phone asking for help?"

"I don't know how it was accomplished, but I think it was your uncle. If I could study his book for a few days I could probably explain it to you, but that's beside the point. This is what's important: to hell with your

uncle! He boiled his own mess of brine and now he's cooking in it. Let him cook. He asked for it and now he's got no right to come whining to you."

"But he wouldn't ask me to help him if there was nothing I could do."

Hugh Payson grinned without humor. "That's another fallacy a good many people have concerning those in the beyond who communicate with us—that they're superior beings somehow. It isn't true, and why should it be? If a man's a liar and a rat on this side, why should he suddenly turn truthful and noble after passing the veil? Listen, kid: if that was your uncle—if he was able to contact you through some devilish ritual we don't know about—he's still the same guy he was on this side. Just as rotten; just as vile. Scared, sure, gibbering and screaming in agony no doubt, but perfectly willing to drag you down with him just for company, and don't forget it."

The waiter figured we were getting too much free time out of the benches. He shuffled over and looked balefully at our empty glasses. We told him to fill them up again and waited until he came back and picked up our dimes. I practically drained my glass in one gulp.

"I'm way over my head on this thing," I told Payson. "I don't know whether I'm in a boat or on stilts. I've got to let it soak into my brain a while and get acquainted with it."

"DON'T THINK about it too much. In fact, try and forget it. I wish I hadn't dropped over the other day and sounded off. It would have saved you a lot of bewilderment...and maybe more."

"I don't know about the book yet. Give me a little time. Right now, I feel like going home and burning it. I'll probably let you have it. But give me a couple of days."

"Sure—sure. I'm not pressing you. Give me a ring when you make up your mind one way or the other."

He got up and walked out, but I stayed where I was, mulling it over. I sat there for an hour, and every so often the barkeep came over and took a dime's rent.

Gradually I began to feel better. Payson was right. Forget the whole rotten thing. That, really, was the best service I could do Uncle Amby. Protect his memory. Let the world think him a fine upstanding man of hallowed memory. If I started digging into this garbage I might shatter that myth forever.

Gradually all the hideous unreality of the situation began to fade. THE BOOK OF AMBROSE? Be damned to THE BOOK OF AMBROSE! I looked around me. I was seated in a fine, wholesome, dirty bar in the poorer section of town. A happy, normal hum who'd had all his teeth kicked out was sitting at the bar pouring a glass of wine into half a glass of beer. Nearby at a table a good-looking mill hand was trying to make a pretty waitress, and both of them were enjoying it. Out in the street, good solid cars and trucks were rolling by. It was a cheerful, healthy world. I went to the phone to call home and tell them I'd be late for supper but was on my way. Lisa answered.

Lisa on the wire. Fear in her voice.

"Come home, Hal. We've been trying to reach you. Come right home."

"What's up? What's the matter?"

"It's mother. The doctor is with her now."

"What happened! For God's sake tell me!"

"A heart attack. I came in from the back yard and found her lying unconscious beside the telephone. They had to pry the receiver out of her hand."

I hung up and staggered toward the door.

As I went out I heard the barkeep sneer, "Huh! On just a few glasses of beer!"

WE NEVER found out the cause of Mother's heart attack. Whether or not someone had spoken to her over the phone. She never told us and no one asked.

When I got home she was conscious and Doc was standing, grave-faced, by the bed. He signalled Lisa to stay with her, and Dad and I followed him out of the room. We got clear downstairs before he spoke: "Carl—how long since you've taken a vacation?"

Dad was a little surprised. "A couple of years. We passed it up last year because—"

"Then you'll have some time, Carl. I want you to take her away—for a month at least."

I asked, "Then she isn't going to—?"

"It isn't as bad as it appears, but the death of her brother has been too much for her. Shock. I want you to take her on a nice leisurely trip somewhere and fill her mind with other things."

I was weak with relief—relief at not having let her set eyes on THE BOOK OF AMBROSE. Realization of what Uncle Amby really was might have—well, she hadn't seen the book and I was glad.

Nothing of any importance happened the next two days except that Lisa and I convinced Dad we were old enough to take care of ourselves for a few weeks. Mother was up and around immediately, but we didn't let her turn a hand. Dad even insisted on carrying her upstairs in spite of her objections that she was perfectly all right.

Late in the second day's afternoon, they flagged down the Sunland Limited and we put Dad and Mother

aboard. Mother wasn't too happy about it.

"We'll wire you when we get there and give you our phone number. Then, in case anything happens—"

I laughed. "Mom—we aren't infants any longer. We'll be fine. If Lisa acts up I'll paddle her by proxy."

Lisa said, "Forget about us and rest, darling. Just rest."

We watched the train pull out. Then we drove home.

Lisa and Mark and I roasted wieners in the back yard that night. About ten o'clock I left them there and went in to finish a book I'd been reading.

I got into bed and dived right into the book, pushing out all thoughts of Uncle Amby and the bewildering occurrences impinging on his death. Unhealthy—unwholesome. Keep them out of mind.

Later, plenty drowsy now, I snapped off the light and punched a comfortable hole in my pillow. Lisa's soft laughter drifted in the open window.

BUT JUST before sleep, there must be an unguarded moment when the mind is cut off from the will power and seeks its own paths. My mind went to THE BOOK OF AMBROSE. Out of memory marched certain words I'd read therein. And with them came a strange warmth.

The possibilities of pleasure in the human form can be realized only, according to the worshippers, by cultivated adoration of the All-Dark. Complete submission to the Prince is signified by acknowledging his sovereignty automatically in the potent and rewarding fields. The King of Lust. The Emperor of Desire. The prayers. "Madarg phalanatus ladion. Mishabwa! Mishabwa! Mishabwa!"

There was a strange, terrifying rhythm to the prayer. I'd read it but

once; yet I knew it perfectly. I wondered what Mishabwa meant. It rang through my mind to the accompaniment of little silver bells and—

I was walking up a strange new street—not of dreams but tangible; as real and solid as awakening in the morning and going to sleep at night. So real as to make me cringe with embarrassment at the things around me.

This was a narrow street lined with old houses of red brick. There were tiny gardens in front of each house and the gardens had been watered because it was the morning of a summer day. The air was perfumed with the smell of new water and thirsty plants. But there was a sweeter, more feverish thirst in the air, a warming aura which plucked each nerve in my body with a tingling anticipation—of what? I knew what. By all the Black Arts I knew what!

Madarg—Mishabwa.

At the corner I glanced up at a guide-post to see the name River Street printed thereon. But I gave it scarcely a look. My eyes were on the people.

No children in River Street.

And none middle-aged or old.

Only those in the sweet years of new promise and fulfillment. Only the beautiful and godlike lived on River Street.

THE GIRL sitting on the first flight of steps could have had but one name: Invitation.

Beauty revealed by a single garment and unabashed posturing. But not lewd—not indecent. Rather the eager, sparkling invitation of innocence: *I am what I am and the hours are short. Come. There is little time.*

She smiled and held out her hand. "Touch me. We don't need words. Only touch me. That will be enough."

I reached forth a hand, but laughter came from above. I looked up. A youth and a girl leaned out of a window.

Both were smiling. The youth's muscled shoulders were golden bronze. His teeth were dazzling. One arm was over the girl's shoulders. The other cut of sight as they knelt at the sill.

The girl laughed. Her skin, too, was golden. As my hand stretched toward that of the girl on the steps, the one above rose up in the window almost to the waist.

I caught my breath and withdrew my hand while the youth laughed proudly. The girl on the steps pouted until a blonde young man came out of the house and picked her up.

And laughter. All was laughter.

She clung to him as they went into the house and closed the door. The air about me crackled with fiery anticipation.

They populated the street; the young, the eager, the carefree. Beautiful as gods and goddesses. Wild as colts in a pasture.

The sight weakened my knees. I could have turned and gone away, but I didn't want to. I wanted to stay and be one of them.

A girl sat nursing naked golden legs on the curb, splashing her feet in water lying warm on the bricks. Her only clothing was her protective posture.

"This is River Street," she said.

"I know."

"Why did you come?"

I thought: Why is this tolerated in a decent city? Why don't the police put a stop to this? Where are the reporters, the photographers?

Where are the children and the older ones?

"Mishabwa?"

"Yes, Mishabwa."

She smiled a brilliant smile and stretched her legs full length into the street. A trifle shy now, like a quivering doe in a frozen moment. "We must go inside."

She got up and ran into the house.

I started to follow her. With my foot on the first step, I stopped and looked up the street whence I'd come. My lips curled in a sneer. The dirty-minded ones—the prudes—the unbeautiful ones would like to stop all this. But they couldn't. I exulted in the knowledge that they couldn't destroy this beauty, this happiness.

The Prince barred their way.

The Prince barred their way with a circle of fire from which they cringed backwards in their pot-bellied unloveliness, powerless to intervene.

Madam.

I LOOKED down the street while the air sparkled crystal with the sheer ecstasy of promise. Four young goddesses had joined hands and were dancing around a curly-headed youth. He laughed and broke the circle by seizing one of them. He carried her away and she lay extended and stiff in his arms like a beautiful statue. But there was a quivering in her body and her closed eyelids trembled.

There was laughter from the window of a red-brick house. I looked up. The quick flash of bodies in movement. Bodies that vanished with the laughter to leave the window dark with languorous, rose-tinted emptiness. Eloquent darkness.

I walked on through the laughter—the invitation—the gayety of innocent and fiery living. I stopped and looked at the number on the house before me.

151 River Street.

But this house was different. Not red brick. A gray building with high, small windows and a smooth, unadorned front. A narrow, brooding building.

Beside the door was a polished bronze plate.

Massasoit Fabrics Inc. 2nd Floor.

I knew now why I had come to River



Street. How could I not have remembered before? To find Uncle Ambrose. How could I have been so forgetful?

I stood staring at the building; at the smooth gray wall; at the narrow door, slightly ajar. The door moved further inward as from a vagrant breeze. There was a small scurrying of feet.

A rat came through the door and sat on the sill.

A rat almost as large as a small dog. It had red eyes and—

Intelligence.

Its well-fed belly was covered with soft cream-colored fur. Its eyes were red and in the V of its open, red mouth were white teeth—glistening.

The rat sat upon its high legs as dogs are sometimes trained to do. Its little red eyes were upon me and the mouth seemed to be grinning.

From somewhere came a girl to stand close beside me. I opened my hand and hers was there to be enfolded

as she pressed against me.

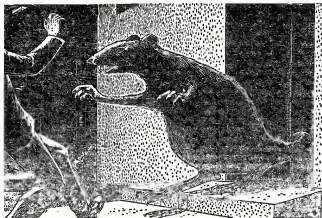
But our eyes were on the rat—the fat-contented rat sitting like a doorman before 151 River Street.

The girl whispered, "Adrongra."

I HAD SEEN the word in THE BOOK OF AMBROSE. I remembered now. It was one of the words in an incantation which came after a long and detailed explanation which began:

The mystic symbol of the cleft runs through all nature as interpreted into terms of ecstatic pleasure. The languorous movement of a tree sending branches from its trunk. In pain and pleasure, the cleft is synonymous with the ultimate. "Sanah adrongra credrac marmansare."

I turned to the girl. She raised her eyes instantly and her lips seemed to reach. An automatic, instinctive gesture. The raising of the eyes. The



The air sparkled with an ecstasy of promise as the fabled rat walked through the door

offering of the lips.

I asked, "Where is The Place of Pain?"

The girl's body quivered. She said nothing, but her sharp nails hit into my arm.

The rat patted its bulging middle with small, soft, contented paws. Then one of the paws was raised in a beckoning signal. The girl against me shivered. Her eyes widened into the stare of one hypnotized. She withdrew her hand from mine and without a backward glance she moved forward, past the red-eyed rat and into the darkness beyond the door of 151 River Street.

A whisking movement and the rat was gone just as the door closed. But so swift the sight could not follow. I could not be sure it had entered the building.

Something gripped my mind; some unknown, unplumbed power deep and dormant. It took hold of my mind and I was walking up the street toward the

corner.

Around me the activity heightened. Loud laughter. Figures in the windows; beckoning arms and bodies. Offerings held stiff and rigid across the arms of the youths.

I walked on because the new power told me to walk away from this place. But even as I walked I cursed the power. I snarled at this force drawing me away from truth and joy and love and innocence.

A single piercing scream brought me home. My pillow was sweat-soaked; the sheets on my bed twisted into wet ropes. As I got out of bed the warm night air was cold against my dripping skin.

I went out into the hall and called, "Lisa—Lisa! Are you all right?"

There was no answer.

I ran through the house, turning on lights as I came to them—into the kitchen and onto the back porch. The yard was moon-drenched but no one

was there. A single curl of lonesome smoke arose from the barbecue pit. A feeling of desolation seized me.

"Lisa! Lisa! Mark!"

I TOURED the house again, looked in Lisa's room with that single, high-pitched scream still echoing through my mind.

I was all alone.

I raced to my room and pulled on my clothes. Then out and into the yard and through the hedge into the Davis yard. The garage door yawned open—dark and empty. But that didn't matter because I knew Mark's folks had gone to their mountain lodge for the weekend.

"Mark! Mark!"

He came, sleepy and grumbling, to the window.

"Whassa matter? What's all the fuss about?"

"Have you seen Lisa?"

"Not—~~for two hours~~—Isn't she in bed?"

"She's gone. I can't find her."

Mark refused to get excited. A small town.—A summer night. What could happen to a girl? Nothing.

It was then I realized what THE BOOK OF AMBROSE had done to me.

"I heard her scream. She's gone. I'm crazy worried."

"Hold it. I'll come down."

Mark got dressed and we went back to the house.

The phone was ringing—faintly as we approached; a monotonous brrring-brrring — brrring-brrring — brrring-brrring on the quiet night air, growing louder and louder.

I shivered. Mark regarded me quizzically under the full moon. "Take it easy, son. What's wrong with you? You got the pip or something? Lisa's all right."

To him it was unthinkable that it should be otherwise. To me— THE

BOOK OF AMBROSE. I envied Mark.

We went into the house and I answered the phone.

"She probably took a walk or something," Mark said.

"Shhh—quiet. Hello."

"I am Margo Dillon."

"Did you ever hear of Margo Dillon? You ought to meet her sometime. She's quite a gal."

"This is Hal Brent of course?"

I told her it was.

The voice was liquid music. Lazy. Invitation was the word:

"You seem worried and upset."

"My sister is gone. I can't find her."

Gentle laughter. "It's quite all right. Lisa is safe. Do you still have THE BOOK OF AMBROSE?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. We must have that book. Immediately."

IT WAS UNTHINKABLE that such things could happen. "You mean you came here tonight? You took Lisa away? That's kidnapping! They give the death sentence for that!"

"Darling, did you read THE BOOK OF AMBROSE?"

"Yes—yes. I read it."

Laughter as, from River Street. "Delightful reading, wasn't it?"

Mark was getting impatient. "Who is it? What the hell're they talking about?"

"Quiet." Then, into the phone, "No! It was rotten—filthy!"

"But it gives one such beautiful dreams—"

"I said it was obscene!"

"But the rest of it. You read that too? The story of the Prince? Of his glorious power and how he rewards the faithful?"

I had read it all.

"Then you realize that calling the police, for instance, would be a waste of time? You realize that no power

outside Hell itself can bring Lisa back to you?"

"I—I—what do you want?"

"The book."

"You can have it. Bring Lisa back. I'll be waiting here with the book. I won't call the police."

"No. We won't come there again."

The tone of her voice caused a frustration within me that was akin to red rage. Lisa was gone. I was bargaining for her life. That I knew. Yet, every word from this Margo Dillon was languorous invitation; hers was the voice of a wanton drawing a lover down to her bed.

I lost control. "You rotten—vile—disgusting—"

Only the laughter. "Tomorrow evening at nine o'clock, you must bring THE BOOK OF AMBROSE to River Street. You know the number."

"Yes—I know the number."

"Good night then. Go back to bed now." A moment of silence. "And your second dream will be far more beautiful—more exciting—because I will be there."

I slammed the receiver down. "Lisa has been kidnapped. They came and got her."

"Then for crissake call the police!"

"We can't. It wouldn't do any good."

"Have you gone nuts?"

"Just what I said. It wouldn't do any good."

Mark elbowed past me. "Then I'll call them!"

I pushed him back. "Cut it out! I know what I'm talking about."

Mark backed away, confused, uncertain. "We've got to do something! Don't just stand there!"

"They want a book I've got. When we take them the book they'll let Lisa go."

"Then what're we waiting for?"

"Not now. They gave me instructions. Tomorrow at nine in the evening.

We'll have to go to Williamsburg."

I GOT MARK quieted down and we were back in the living room. Luckily I saw the pajamas first. They were crumpled up in a ball beside the lounge. I picked them up and wadded them tighter so Mark couldn't see how they were ripped and torn. I shoved them under a cushion and sat down.

Mark was pacing the floor. "It's impossible! It couldn't have happened."

"It did happen."

"You're telling me they came here—into this house—in the middle of the night and took Lisa away? How come we didn't hear the car—see the lights? Good lord, Hal! There would have been a struggle! The neighborhood would have been aroused!"

"No." I watched him striding up and down the room. As he now was, I knew I couldn't keep him under control until the following evening.

"Sit down, Mark. There are some things I've got to tell you. I'll show you the book they want and maybe then you'll understand why we've got to do as they say."

Mark's current trip across the living room took him a little farther than the preceding one—clear to the far side of the room. I saw him stiffen, his eyes slanted toward the floor.

"My God! What's—that!"

I made it in two steps, followed his pointing finger.

On the floor, at the end of the bookcase, lay a giant rat. It was as large as a small dog and its head had been bashed in. Beside it lay one of the brass pokers we kept beside the fire place. The poker was stained with dark blood.

"Hal! Somebody killed a rat! In your living room!"

I shook my head. "No. Lisa put up a fight. She killed a man. If you'll

quiet down, I'll tell you about it."

WE BURIED the rat in the back yard at the same time I dug up THE BOOK OF AMBROSE, and I remember wondering, as we went back to the house, which of the two was the more foul.

We went into the house and I sat across from Mark with the book in my hands and started talking.

"...so beyond all doubt, this devil worshipping cult dates back even to ancient Rome. The knowledge, the rites, the incantations are old and powerful. They are potent enough to corrupt and to kill, Mark. THE BOOK OF AMBROSE proves that the devil—The Prince of Darkness—Satan—Beelzebub—or whatever you want to call him, is not just a symbol signifying all evil."

Mark had thumbed through the book and was now staring at me with a glassy look in his eyes.

"And also," I went on, "that the stories of the Old Testament are not myths and symbolisms. The Battle of the Angels really took place and Satan was cast down from Heaven as surely as you and I sit here."

"Our great weakness, of course—in things of this kind—is our inability to conceive such magnitude with our limited minds. To us, even God Himself is a pleasant, kindly, bearded Man, who sits on a cloud and smiles at cherubs. Our minds are not equipped to conceive what all-powerful means. Therefore, we cannot conceive the vast and awful power of evil."

Mark spoke in a mumbled voice: "That book kind of gives us an idea."

"But even then, only vaguely: When Satan was cast out of Heaven, God saw fit not to destroy him completely. That we know. But we have no idea of the reason for his not doing so. Possibly some people would consider it sacrilege to say that God was not able

to destroy Satan completely, but we've got to be as impersonal as we can in this thing, so the possibility must be considered."

"We have a right to look at it this way: If God—at that time—had had the power to destroy Satan completely, why was there even a battle? Why was the sword of Michael the Archangel depended upon to rout Lucifer the Proud? Why did not God destroy Lucifer and his legions with a thunderbolt?"

Mark's mind wandered momentarily. His eyes turned to the fireplace. He shuddered. "A rat—in the living room—with its brains—"

"Get it out of your mind," I said, and went back to my lecture—words which were for my own benefit as much as for Mark's. A logic to cling to in order to still the fear.

OUR MISTAKE is thinking of both God and Satan as individuals patterned roughly after our own forms, rather than as bodiless entities of pure power. As an example, you were amazed at Lisa's being kidnapped from her own home on a quiet street of a small town. Isn't it foolish, when we consider the forces we're dealing with, to even wonder about means and methods? We're dealing with power, Mark—pure, unadulterated, evil power. This book, in a sense, is nothing more than a handbook of instructions an electrician would carry in order to understand how to harness the power he works with. Only this is a handbook for the worker in evil—another power even more potent and certainly as impersonal as electricity."

"Your—your Uncle Ambrose must have been as rotten—as rotten as—"

I flushed and was sick inside. But then I resolutely forced my mind back onto the impersonal track. "There's little doubt of it. His respectable life

with us was merely a cover-up for his other activities."

Mark got up and made two turns around the room. He passed a distraught hand through his hair and sat down again. He said, "But Hal—the inconceivable obscenity in that book—how could a man—or a woman—"

I stared at the gold lettering on the volume I held in my hands. "On first reading you get the impression the foulness is there only for the sake of foulness—like smokehouse poetry. But a little thought makes me wonder. Some of the practices described, Mark, go beyond obscenity and into the realm of pure foolishness, it seems to me. Some of them appear to go even beyond the degeneracy of distorted sexual urge."

"They're pretty cockeyed—some of them."

"There's another point that strikes me. This cult is a big thing—its roots run far deeper and wider than we realize. Basically, it's a deal whereby Lucifer corrupts the souls of men and women and makes them his own."

"It certainly is."

"But there are many human weaknesses through which Satan can get a grip on man: all the various lusts, the greed for wealth, for power, for flesh, and many others."

"So possibly this dark unit we've uncovered is only one sect of a far vaster cult. This one seems dedicated to animal lust. There's nothing in this book that promises wealth or power or anything but immense physical satisfaction."

Again Mark sprang to his feet. "Hell and damnation! All this is fine—all this abstract talk—this swell impersonal approach! But it doesn't help Lisa any!"

"There's nothing we can do about Lisa until tomorrow. Why don't you get a little sleep?"

"What about you?"

"I don't feel like sleeping."

I didn't tell him I'd spend the rest of the night under a cold shower rather than lay myself open to meeting Margo Dillon in that other world beyond the curtain of slumber.

"I don't feel like it either," Mark said. "Let's make some coffee."

We went out to the kitchen and filled the percolator. We each drank two cups of strong black coffee. We smoked enough cigarettes to fill an ash tray. But the night dragged by on an uphill grade and the coffee didn't seem to help.

Which shows how helpless is one person's will power against the infiltration of evil. I'd said I'd do anything to stay awake and avoid those potent dreams. I forced my conscious mind to believe this. But the subconscious knew better.

I wanted to go to sleep. I wanted to go again to the tingling, vibrant street of the scrubbed red bricks. My subconscious knew—and it was the final master of waking and sleeping. I remembered slipping sideways on the lounge, and that was all....

BUT IT wasn't River Street. It was the perfume counter of a large department store. I recognized the place. Altarie's, in Williamsburg.

I stood there in the aisle, somewhat confused, wondering by what incantation or dark word from THE BOOK OF AMBROSE I'd come to this place. Two elderly women hurried along the aisle. I stepped aside quickly before realizing it wasn't necessary. They couldn't see me.

They stopped abruptly, their attention caught by a novel display of perfume on the counter. The name of the scent was *Serpent's Wife*. Not too appropriate, I thought, but the bottle in which it came had a certain fascination. It was shaped like a cobra coiled and the perfume was excreted through

the fangs in the open mouth of the glass reptile.

There was some discussion between the potential buyers and the girl behind the counter; discussion I didn't catch. Then, quite clearly, the sales girl said, "I'd appreciate it if you'd ask for Miss Dillon in case you change your mind."

The women went on down the aisle and I knew beyond doubt who this girl was. She was exceptionally slim and her hair, expertly done, was somewhere between gold and bronze. She had white, even teeth, and a smile seemingly painted on and held in place by clear varnish.

I moved closer and the illusion of great beauty fell away. Deep in the blue eyes I could see a terrible discontent: There were tiny lines at the corners of her mouth and her eyes. The skin of her throat, upon close examination, revealed the crepe surface all women fear.

She seemed not to see me, yet I knew she was truly aware of my presence. I was still staring at the eyes which kept eluding mine, when my attention was diverted in a manner which caused me to leap sharply backwards.

The perfume bottle on the counter. It came alive. It greatened and expanded until it was no longer a perfume bottle but a coiled reptile weaving sinuously, as to Satanic music I could not hear.

BUT THAT was only the beginning.

As I stood there rooted, the snake continued to grow. Its eyes were large and magnetic now, holding me powerless. It thickened—lengthened into a reptile of boa-constrictor proportions until the counter itself was hidden.

The girl was changing, too. Gone was the blue frock she had worn as a salesgirl. For a moment she stood be-

fore me entirely nude. Then it seemed a portion of the snake's scaly hide slipped from its body to form a dark brassiere covering the girl's breasts. But the covering was really a lewd denuding. Better the bare flesh than the leering suggestion of the bra.

As I watched, the snake itself became licentious in its languorous turnings and twistings. My brain swam, but more in ecstasy than terror: The suggestiveness of the writhing snake was well nigh overwhelming, stirring depths of darkness within me I had never known existed.

For a brief moment the hideousness of the creature increased. Odd, lobster-like heads appeared. Blank lusting eyes devoured the girl.

Then the illusion vanished. I leaned hard against the opposite counter for support and only now did the girl I knew to be Margo Dillon acknowledge my presence.

She did it with a smile of complete understanding as to what passions had been stirred within me. There were ten thousand years of hideous and ecstatic wisdom in that smile.

She paused, after a sudden caressing motion toward the coiled perfume bottle, then glanced quickly up and down the aisle. And there was about her such an impression of feverish anticipation—stark unbridled desire for abominable manifestation—as toicken me and yet hold me in terrible fascination.

Assured no other person watched, her eyes drooped with languor; her body arched as she smiled at me and her hands enacted inviting caressing motions up and down her body.

There was no power within me to resist. I moved forward like a robot controlled by outer forces. I drew close to the counter, close enough to hear her rose-tinted whisper: "Only the Prince opens the doors to true ec-

stasy."

The face and form faded and there were only the licentious arms, like the coils of the snake, rippling and flowing and drawing me closer.

Then a rough hand on my shoulder.

"Wake up, Hal. For a guy that wasn't going to sleep, you did pretty well."

I opened my eyes and rolled to a sitting position with my face in my hands. "I'm—sick! God—I'm sick!"

"You been reading that book too much. Or maybe the coffee got you. Anyway, it's morning and I've decided we'd better go to the police."

I shuddered at the thought of having to exert myself—to talk him out of it all over again. It took twenty minutes before I got his grudging word to handle this thing my way.

I took a shower, and while Mark was freshening up I scrambled some eggs even though I had no appetite. While I measured out more coffee, I thought of the sports reporter, Hugh Payson. Strange that I'd forgotten him. He was the logical person to whom my mind should have gone when Lisa disappeared.

PAYSON understood. He had made a study of this dark and horrible business—this cult that thrived in lust and obscenities. He would be sympathetic and would help us.

I would most certainly get in touch with him.

But there was another matter I wanted to look into first. After Mark had eaten most of the eggs and we'd downed some more black coffee, I checked the Interurban timetable. A train was due through at nine-fifteen. We called a cab and caught the train just as it was pulling out. In my pocket I carried THE BOOK OF AMBROSE wrapped in brown paper.

After leaving the depot in Williams-

burg, we walked four blocks over to Main and turned left. Three blocks further on were the big neon signs and the huge show windows of Altair's.

We shouldered our way through the mid-morning crowds and entered the big department store.

The perfume and cosmetic counters were on the mezzanine floor. We climbed the stairs, Mark grumbling along behind me.

"I don't know why you're so damned secretive about where we're going. If you've got to buy something, why don't you say so?"

It wasn't through any desire to be mysterious that I hadn't told him what I had in mind. It was just that I didn't feel like explaining it all—telling him about my second dream and possibly having him think I'd gone off my rocker.

But I hadn't. There she was—wearing the blue-smock and drawing her hands dreamily up her body in an unconscious gesture to press them with spread fingers under her breast.

I moved closer. There were the fine lines passing youth and discontent at the corners of her mouth and eyes.

But no recognition—no recognition at all.

I laid the book on the counter; then, glancing down to discover something missing, I asked, "I've heard of a new perfume, Miss. I believe it's called *Serpent's Wife* or something like that. Is it in stock?"

I thought her red lips were going to draw back to a snarl. Slowly she reached under the counter and brought forth the snake bottle.

"An entrancing odor, sir. I'm sure your lady will like it."

I had achieved some sort of a victory. I sensed it, but what the victory was I didn't know. Except possibly an exhibition of a courage I didn't feel.

Suddenly charged with this false courage, I unwrapped THE BOOK OF AMBROSE and laid it on the counter before her. "Is the perfume very expensive?"

ONLY HER eyes moved—nothing else. Yet her desire to seize the book was naked and undisguised. "Seventeen dollars an ounce—plus tax, sir."

I grinned at her. "My, my! It certainly does come high." I turned the black book around with the tip of my finger, tempting her, putting it deliberately within her grasp. And at the same time came the question:

Why do they want this book so badly? What great danger to them is eliminated if they gain possession of it? How does the loss of this book threaten them?

I smiled down at the glass snake. "I'm afraid I can't afford it. By the way—you're Miss Dillon, aren't you?"

"Why—yes."

I lowered my voice. "Caress Dillon? You reside in The Place of Pain?"

There was panic in the glances she threw up and down the aisle. "I don't understand you."

"You've been called 'the dangerous one'?"

"I—please, sir. Would you care to buy the perfume or not?"

"If you took the book now could Lisa be freed immediately? Why is it necessary to wait until evening?"

She was filled with suppressed rage. That I knew even though she was outwardly bewildered, a picture of confusion.

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake, sir. I don't know what you're talking about."

Her eyes dropped to the book. For an instant I thought she meant to grab it and I tensed myself to jerk it out of reach if she tried.

Then her self-control sprang a leak.

Hatred blazed up in her face. "You fool!" she whispered. "You utter fool!"

It was indeed strange that I was able to follow her every thought—look through that ravaged flower of a face and see what went on in her brain. But I ignored the danger I saw within. My own feeling of triumph was too heady, too precious.

"Where is your power now, Miss Dillon? Is it something that is potent only in dark alleys and on garbage heaps?"

Her voice was like the snarl of a cat. "I'll show you power, you idiot!" The words were grated out—spoken through clenched teeth; her eyes slid past my face and over my shoulder and now she smiled in devilish joy.

I heard the startled scream behind me. I whirled.

FIFTY FEET down the aisle a young woman was apparently fighting for her life. The man who had attacked her was middle-aged, prosperous-looking, obviously of some profession.

But now he was little more than a beast. He'd evidently turned upon the girl and assaulted her without warning. In a frenzy of animal fury, he seized her and forced her backward across a counter. His hands went to her throat to stifle the screams that rang through the store.

I leaped forward, but Mark was ahead of me. We dived at the man together but, with the cunning of madness, he spun away from the girl and smashed a fist flush against Mark's jaw. Mark went down after skittering backward far enough to carry me down with him.

As I struggled out from under Mark's limp body, the man again turned on the girl. He meant to kill her, but kill in a sadistic, horrifying

manner which was all too apparent in his actions.

Probably the girl was too full of terror to know embarrassment or shame. And possibly she was too dazed by the sudden ferocity of the attack to know the full weight of terror.

I hurled myself at the man again, but his strength had been doubled and tripled from an outside source. He knocked me fifteen feet with one swing of an arm.

The girl, stretched writhing on the counter, thought now only of self-preservation. Her writhings were elemental—basic—horrible.

As I regained my feet, two men in plain clothes were converging on the a battering-ram fist at the closest detectives. They had moved instantly because they were trained to do so. The shoppers, to a person, stood helpless in frozen horror.

The maniac seemed to have eyes in the back of his head. At just the right moment he straightened away from his terrible work upon the girl and drove a battering-ram fist at the closest detective.

But the latter weaved in like a prize fighter, going under the fist to swing a blackjack down on the attacker's skull. It was a blow of stunning force, yet it slowed him hardly at all. It was the second sap coming down on his skull that saved the first detective from the smashing fists of the man.

The work of the store detectives was almost as horrifying as the man's insane attack upon the girl. They worked as a team—brutality without passion; a pair of machines doing the job they had to do.

Blood spurted from the man's head to spray the naked flesh of the prone girl with a crimson sheen. Then she fell off the counter out of sight.

The man would not go down. He would not fall. He fought with ever-

increasing strength^o until the saps of the detectives were soggy with blood. Then he reached out—a crimson bull—and took one of the men in his hands and raised him up like a rag doll. High over his head he held the man, bent upon hurling him like a missile.

A gun barked sharply—twice.

And still the man would not fall.

I tore my eyes away from the sight—turned them on Caress Dillon. Her mask was off and all her bestiality and sadism was there for the world to see—had the world been looking. She was enjoying this thing she had done—done deliberately to show me her power.

I LOOKED back at the lead-filled maniac just as he collapsed, with the detective still helpless in his hands. "Let's get out of here, Mark," I croaked. "Let's go quick—while I'm still able."

As I moved from the perfume counter, the lazy voice of Caress Dillon came to me. "Nine o'clock, Mr. Brent. I'll be expecting you."

Her voice made me think of a cat lapping blood.

Mark finally caught up with me out in the street. He grabbed my arm. "Hal! What the hell's wrong with you. It was bad, but you're acting worse than some of the women there."

"She did it," I babbled. "That girl behind the counter. She's one of them. She used her power on that man! She staged the whole thing!"

He stared at me in silence for a long time. Around us people were moving in the direction of Alterie's. The news had spread and the sensation-seekers were closing in.

"You'd better put that book in your pocket," Mark said. "You'll lay it down somewhere and forget it."

I raised my hand to find I'd snatched THE BOOK OF AMBROSE

off the counter. I shoved it into my pocket. "Come on. I need a drink. I need a drink bad."

We went into the first tavern we came to. With the bar supporting me, I squeezed my eyes tight shut—trying to blot out the vision of that man lying dead—smashed and gore-soaked—on the floor of Alterie's. And of the stripped and terrorized girl just before she'd fallen from the counter.

"What chance have we got against power like that?" I muttered. "What chance?"

SOMEHOW, the day passed. We had a late lunch and then prowled up and down the streets like a pair of restless cats. The incident in Alterie's had opened new concepts to me and I remember thinking:

The members of this foul cult are not shadowy beings who appear only after dusk and vanish in the morning light. If we find one selling perfume in a department store, then they no doubt function in other places and professions. They are soda jerks and plumbers and hair dressers and housewives and steeplejacks and window washers and hat makers and lawyers and—

Doctors.

Somehow that last hit me harder than all the rest. I had sudden sickening visions of how even a tiny segment of that great and honorable profession could further its licentious desires. The trust of the patient—the sacred privacy involved.

I had to stop thinking about it. We stopped to rest on a park bench and I breathed a prayer. That we could present **THE BOOK OF AMBROSE** as per instructions, free Lisa, and run away from the whole rotten mess. I wanted only to forget it—to go home and let time blot out the memory.

"HELLO."

I looked up and saw Hugh Payson standing in front of me. It was the first happy moment I'd had all day.

He grinned that lazy, heartwarming grin and sat down. "I'm glad I bumped into you. I was thinking of giving you a ring."

"I'd planned to call you, too."

"Who's your friend?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. This is Mark Davis. He runs around with Lisa, my sister."

"Glad to know you."

Mark mumbled something and they shook hands.

"About that book," Payson said.

"What did you decide?"

"I can't give it to you."

"You're going to burn it then?"

"No. We've got to use it as ransom. They've got Lisa and we've got to give them the book."

"Got Lisa?"

He wasn't a man capable of much surprise. He reacted too slowly.

"Yes. They kidnapped her last night."

"You didn't go to the police?"

"No."

He thought that over. "I'm glad to hear you say that. Glad you were smart. The police could do nothing."

"I didn't think they could either."

"What were their instructions?"

I told him and he pondered it for so long I thought he was going to come up with something, but he didn't.

I said, "Look—you never really told me what your stake in all this is. You said you made a study of my uncle, but that was about all. Why are you interested and why do you want **THE BOOK OF AMBROSE**?"

"As a pornographic piece, maybe."

"I don't think so."

"I didn't think you would."

"You're a writer. Are you planning to hit this cult in the papers or a

magazine? Give them some publicity?"

"That's it."

He didn't seem interested in going into it further. After a while I said, "I met Margo Dillon. In Alterie's. She put on a demonstration for us."

"She what?"

"Used her mumbo-jumbo to make a man jump on a girl in the store and try to— to kill her. Store cops killed the man."

Mark, staring at the sidewalk, broke his silence. "What do you mean, Hal? What do you mean, Margo Dillon, started it?"

"Never mind. You'll understand later."

HUGH PAYSON was full of sober thought. "I hadn't heard. But why did she do it? She must have had a reason."

"I think I made her mad."

"Uh-huh. If you anger one of them enough—"

"Is there anything you can do to help us?"

"You mean about Lisa?"

"Yes."

It took him so long to answer this one I was afraid we'd miss our appointment on River Street. Finally he said, "I think they'll keep their word."

"I hope so, but I may have muffed it already."

"How so?"

"It was Margo Dillon who called about having Lisa."

"Did she tell you she worked at Alterie's?"

"No. I—I had a dream."

"I see."

"In the dream I saw her in the department store and went down there to see how accurate the dream was."

"And it was accurate?"

"Most of it. I knew her the minute I saw her."

"You think because you antagonized

her she may double-cross you some way?"

"It follows, doesn't it?"

"It could."

I got up from the bench. "Well, it's time to go, I guess."

"Want me to come along?"

"Do you think it would help?"

"You should know better than I do."

He meditated a while.

Mark said, "Six fists might be better than four."

"I don't think fists would mean much in this kind of a fight, but we'll see. Let's flag a cab."

We rode to the intersection of River Street and Fourth. There we paid off the cab and took our bearings.

THOSE DEVILISHLY accurate dreams! It wasn't a strange new street any more because I'd been there before. The old red brick houses. The tiny gardens in front of them. The aura of isolation as though this block-long thoroughfare were a community sufficient unto itself—completely set apart from the city surrounding it.

But it was the same as the department-store dream and later reality. Only a portion of it completely accurate. The buildings, the street, the gardens.

There were no posturing girls in view; no gorgeous female bodies seated on the stairs in studied poses of lewdness. No young men to seize them and carry them laughing into the houses. No invisible and languid consummations inside the house.

There were a few old folks on the porches and others watering the flower beds. Children, too, running care-free and safe from harm in the dead-end street.

"Well," Mark grumbled. "Are we going to stand here all night?"

I came back to the place and the

time with a start. "Sorry. I guess I'm jittery."

"Who isn't? I still think we ought to yell copper."

Payson said nothing. He'd lighted his pipe, and the rich tobacco aroma added to the pleasant, quiet summer-evening scene.

We started moving up the street, our footsteps echoing against the buildings. We were watched by the residents of River Street. But not with any show of hostility. Only casual and friendly interest.

But to me it was like a death walk. In spite of everything, I could only liken it to tales I'd read of men walking through the death-house corridor to the electric chair.

I thought of Lisa and my rage strengthened me. Was she still alive? What had they done to her? Would they keep their word and let us take her home when the hook was in their hands?

Sudden panic seized me. Was this a dreadful mistake? Were we walking into a trap from which we would never escape? After all, I was on to them! I knew them in all their foulness and evil. Would they let me live? Would they let Mark and Lisa live?

I'd had no reason to bring Mark into this. It was unfair, a betrayal. I said, "Mark—why don't you go on home? This isn't for you. I'll be able to take care of it all right."

Mark's answer was short and to the point: "Do you want a poke in the nose?"

That settled that.

WE TURNED in at 151 and I noted another discrepancy between the dream and the reality. Before, the name plate of Massassoit Fabrics Inc. had been brightly polished. Now it was thick with green residue; corroded and almost unread-

able.

We opened the door and went inside.

Dusk, but not darkness, had fallen, and the street lamp directly in front of the building threw yellow rays along a silent, empty corridor. There was an air of desertion about the building. Dust lay thick upon the floor. The walls were dark with grime.

The dim light from outside revealed a small electric bulb, also heavy with dust, fastened flush to the wall with a short cord hanging beneath it. Payson pulled the cord and the bulb came alive to give dim radiance to the desolate scene; to throw long shadows before us and reveal a stairway at the far end of the hall.

We moved forward, passed glass-paneled doors on either side; panels bearing no names, but staring and vacant like the blind eyes of the dead.

I knew there was no Massassoit Fabric Company housed in this building, but the revelation did not surprise me. I'd known for quite a while the name was only a fiction behind which Uncle Ambrose had hidden his activities.

Mark, walking close behind me, muttered in my ear, "Jeeps, what a joint! If they're holding Lisa in a place like this, she's probably scared to death by now."

I had no answer and neither did Hugh Payson. We moved on down the hall, Payson slightly in the lead. I asked him, "Have you been here before?"

"Yes. This fabric outfit has been out of here a long time. Their offices were on the second floor. That's where we'd better go."

The stairs creaked under our feet as we mounted in single file. At the top, Payson found another light bulb and snapped it on. The second floor was a repetition of the first. Dust, grime; a line of doors closed, no doubt,

on more emptiness and dirt.

Until we came to one upon which the name *Massasoit* was painted. And in a lower corner the word *Private*. Payson turned the knob, pushed it open.

The silence and tenseness of the moment was broken as by a barrage of artillery going off in our faces. With the effect of that, but in a different manner.

As Payson opened the door, there was a high-pitched squeal of rage, the scurrying of small feet, and a furry form brushed past our ankles.

MARK WENT straight up in the air. The shock of it threw me back against the wall. But Payson moved swiftly. It was the first quick movement I'd ever seen him achieve. He barked a sharp curse and kicked out viciously at the rat. He caught the creature square center and lifted it from the floor in a boost that would have satisfied a drop-kick artist on a football field.

The rat screamed in pain and hit the wall. Its screaming continued—a high, keening sound that tore at my nerves, and set my teeth on edge. It came down on its back, scrambled for footing and made off down the hall.

But, halfway to the stairs, it stopped, turned deliberately, came to the sitting position I'd seen in my dream, and stared at us with bared teeth.

And I saw it again.
Intelligence.

This was no ordinary rat. In its flashing red eyes were curses and maledictions. Its snarling teeth were symbolic of something far more dangerous than the bite of a rodent.

Its defiance seemed to enrage Payson. With another growled oath, he charged the rat. It snarled at him anew and its teeth seemed to lengthen.

But it rejected battle, whirled and went scurrying down the stairs.

Payson came back, grinning, somewhat abashed. "These old buildings aren't kept up very well. You're liable to find anything inside them."

Mark had nothing to say. He wiped his face with a handkerchief and looked with loathing at the stairway down which the rat had fled.

I had nothing to say either. Payson pushed the door open and we went inside. Another wall bulb gave off light when Payson pulled the cord.

The room was entirely empty. Four bare walls, a floor, a ceiling from which chunks of plaster had peeled away and fallen to the floor. One small window was thick with dirt.

We stood there in silence, utterly let down.

"She's not here," Mark muttered. "They gave us the business. They tricked us!"

"But why—why?" I turned to Payson for an answer. "Margo Dillon called up and told us what to do. We followed instructions to the letter. Why did they do this to us?"

Then my mind worked. *Finally* it worked. All the pieces interlocked and I saw the treachery.

Without signalling the punch, I started a right smash toward the point of Payson's jaw.

THE BLOW never landed. Payson was a deception—all deception. Even to the lazy movements and the apparently slow, deliberate mental processes.

He slipped my punch and brought up his own left; a hard, straight jab that got me full on the jaw and sent me down.

Mark was unable to react, and he was hardly to be blamed. So far as he could see, I'd suddenly gone crazy and tried to slug Payson when his hands

were down. To Mark it must have looked for all the world like the deal in Alterie's when the man went out of his head and attacked the girl.

But he had to catch on quick, because Payson took a small gun from his pocket before I could get up from the floor, and he stepped back toward the door so he had us both covered.

The grin. But not amiable now because I could see behind it. I could see the rottenness of him; the corruption of soul that arose like a stench in the room.

I got up and wiped a trickle of blood from my mouth. I said, "That handkerchief I found in Uncle Ambrose's room. It wasn't his, was it? It belonged to you. The one with S. R. on it. Satan's Representative."

"That's right. It was my handkerchief. But I'm more interested in why you finally woke up. I was beginning to wonder—"

Mark took two steps forward: he moved in a crouch, his arms hanging loose. "You son-of-a-bitch!"

"Stay where you are."

"Do what he says, Mark. He'll kill you. He'll kill you with no more thought than when he kicked that rat."

Hugh Payson laughed pleasantly. "No, not quite the same as that. You see, the rat was of no consequence. We had failed with it. It was valueless."

Mark was breathing heavily. "Where is she?"

Payson ignored Mark and turned to me. "You didn't get a chance to answer my question."

I leaned wearily against the wall. I'd been such a fool! Such a stupid ass. For a moment, all resistance went out of me.

"Just what were your mental processes in figuring out the truth?"

"It came to me just now—one little point. When we met you earlier to-

night, I told you about the attack in Alterie's store. You said you hadn't heard of it. That of course was silly. It was already in the papers, and besides you were a newspaperman. You'd have known about it before it hit the street."

PAYSON considered carefully.

"That's quite true. And an utterly useless deception. I could as easily have said I had heard about it." He laughed. "I guess it was just my instinctive love of the lie—the untruth. But you didn't deduce the whole deception from that small point."

"No. There was that 'accidental' meeting in the park. Accidental, my eye! You were probably following us all day. You were slated to meet us."

He nodded.

"But there's one thing I don't get," I said. "Why was Lisa kidnapped? And why did you ask for the book as ransom? Such extreme measures weren't necessary."

"Weren't they?"

"No. You asked me for the book and I was making up my mind. I hadn't told you I wouldn't give it to you. You could have gotten it with a little persuasion because I didn't care much one way or the other."

He was lounging against the door, apparently enjoying himself. "There was really no connection between the two—the book and the taking of Lisa. I was sure I could have gotten the book. But then I saw Lisa."

He didn't have to say any more. *But then I saw Lisa.* It was all said in those five terrible words. Mark belatedly like a bull and hurled himself straight at Payson.

The latter's body melted into one long, smooth, unhurried motion. At the outward point of that arcing movement was the gun he carried. It clicked sharply against Mark's skull and Mark

went down like a felled ox.

I took a forward step.

"Stand back! Leave him alone. He'll be all right. And stay away from me or I'll cripple you."

I stood there like an animal at bay, and after a while Payson went on talking: "You see, after I saw Lisa I could hardly take my eyes off her. The kidnapping was a matter of necessity. Then other points came up. You had read *THE BOOK OF AMBROSE*. You knew too much. You were dangerous. You had to be dealt with, and luring you here with the alleged ransom deal was perfectly logical."

"Then you never meant to keep your word."

He looked at me with genuine pity. "Of course not."

"What's happened to Lisa?"

"Nothing yet."

"What will happen to her?"

"She will become a disciple. Just as you and your friend will become disciples."

"Do you think for a minute we'll join your rotten outfit?"

HIS EYES were changing. Now they were deeper, more magnetic. "You'll have no choice."

"Like hell we have no choice. We'll see you behind bars. Then the chair. Kidnapping carries the death penalty."

"I spoke only of the first possibility. There is another. If by some weird chance you can't be converted—an unthinkable thing—you will be killed."

"You can't murder three people in cold blood and get away with it!"

His calm self-confidence was maddening. "It's been done before and will be done again. Where do you think we get the virgins for our Black Mass? Twice a year in this country a girl disappears. She dies on our altar and is never heard of again. Many have disappeared—for other reasons. At times, in our ceremonies, there are violent

and exquisite deaths—accidental, of course. But the unfortunate ones are never heard of again. I'd suggest you check the missing persons files in any city in the country. Ask the police what happened to a certain percentage of these people." Hugh Payson shrugged. "The police don't know."

Now he frowned and glanced at the door—then at his wristwatch. "They're rather late," he murmured.

I was ready to ask him another question when Mark stirred and came groggily to a sitting position. His eyes opened and fell on Payson. "You son-of-a-bitch."

Payson grinned.

Then the sound of the lower door opening. Footsteps creaking on the stairs. Up the hall. They came into the room.

Four very ordinary-looking young men.

But there was something about them. A cowering; a ratlike cunning in their eyes; eyes that did not meet other eyes squarely, but always snapped downward as though in unconscious shame.

Payson gave them no greeting. He indicated Mark with a nod of his head. "Take him first."

They were skilled in their trade. It happened so quickly I could scarcely follow their movements. They flashed in and held Mark helpless; got him before he could raise a finger. One of them had a hypodermic needle that plunged home. Mark went inert as though he'd been slugged again with the gun butt.

They came at me just as swiftly. I managed to get in one punch. It glanced off an ingrown chin but must have done little damage, because their strength and science got me and the needle plunged home.

That was all.

THERE WERE gentle fingers stroking my brow; soft, skillful, searching fingers massaging my temples and smoothing away the ache. There was a brooding restful quiet and a pleasant incense in the air. I opened my eyes.

"Where am I?"

The answer was not immediately forthcoming. The girl sitting beside me was vaguely familiar. Somewhere I had seen her before, but I had certainly not appreciated her beauty or I would have remembered instantly.

She had hair somewhere between gold and shining bronze. She wore a white, simple gown under which the contours of her breasts were a yearning perfection. Regardless of her name, she was Desire.

"You are in a wonderful place. The House of Pain it is called. It is only one of the fabulous mansions in which you will live from now on."

Something was wrong with my head. I was filled with a languor, a wonderful comfort which seemed wrong somehow, but there was no power in my mind to resist it. None of the instinctive revulsion I knew I should have.

I looked closer at the girl. I knew her name.

"Caress—Caress Dillon."

She smiled and was more beautiful than when the serpent had wrapped its protective coils around her. She bent close, to kiss me, and I remembered something about lined and crepey skin. But that must have been an illusion because her flesh was firm and cool. Her skin luminous in the bloom of eternal youth.

She kissed me, and there was fire under the ice.

"All this and more," she whispered, "will be given you by the Prince. You have only to accept him; to acknowledge his supremacy. He is good to his children. You will learn to adore him."

"The Prince?"

"His power is supreme. He could crush us all. He could demand and make us obey under crushing thunderbolts. But he is good and kind and he loves us as he would have us love him."

I knew this was wrong, but the wrongness of it did not seem important. I was annoyed by the feeling of uneasiness that lay far down in my being; that kept chiding me—depriving me of the full enjoyment of this beautiful creature who offered herself.

"Tell me of the Prince."

HER HAND continued to stroke my brow, and there was something electric in her touch. "The Prince rules the warm netherworlds where he has built a labyrinth of pleasure for his children. In order to become one with him, you must give him your soul; give it trustingly into his keeping. Only then are you truly a child of Lucifer the Happy One. Only then can you know pure joy."

"Lucifer the—Happy One?"

"Truly—that is his secret name. And when you become one with him, you share in his power. You become strong and beautiful and all beauty and loveliness is yours."

It all sounded right and good and wonderful. But, somehow, a faint revulsion stirred deep within me. But one so faint as to be of little importance; merely annoying—like a lone-some fly buzzing against a screen.

"Are you a child of Lucifer?"

"I am a fortunate one. I am allowed to reside at the Mass. I help bear the flesh to the altar."

"What need is there of flesh?"

Answer by indirection. No answer at all. "The sweet flesh. The soft scented flesh which is the symbol of life. The humble offering we make to our Satanic father."

Our Satanic father. The sound of it

was rhythm. The syllables of it were units of comfort and power which pulsed through my veins.

"His Satanic Majesty. Our father."

His Satanic Majesty. Haven of joy. Horizon of promise.

I passed my fingers over her smooth cheek. "You are beautiful."

"I am only a reflection of him. I am yours for the taking."

My arms moved around her body, pressed against her shoulders, into the small of her curving back.

"I am yours, but only a small part of what he promises you in return for complete submission," she whispered. "The wine you taste from my lips is but a poor sample of the vintages awaiting you."

A sound, and we were no longer alone. Margo Dillon made an odd, quick motion over my eyes. Her fingers pressed lightly against my temples and it was as though she'd disconnected me in some manner. All my senses were as before, but seemed totally severed from my body so far as action, resentment or movement was concerned. My eyes closed and I could not open them. But I hardly wanted to, so complete and perfect was my comfort.

A man spoke. A lazy voice. Somewhere I'd heard it before. "Any progress?"

"Excellent progress," the girl answered. "I think he is almost ready. He is even more than passive to the Prince."

THE MAN'S voice turned bitter, harsh. "You're a fool, Dillon. We've been through this so often and you stay as naive and optimistic as ever. We had to kill your last three subjects because of inept handling."

"I do my best."

"You seem to forget that final submission must be accomplished without

drugs. The subject must pledge his allegiance while completely unfettered, from choice. The drugs are only to break down the will power—to make the subject susceptible to the temptation. They are far from infallible in the long run."

"But I am sure about this one," Margo Dillon said eagerly. "I think my luck has changed."

I knew who the man was, Hugh Payson. I lay there listening to them discuss me as though I weren't in the room. Yet my reaction was entirely negative. It made no difference to me.

"How is the girl coming?" Margo asked.

Payson's voice turned savage. "Mind your business! I'll take care of the girl! Concentrate on the work allotted to you."

"I'm sorry. I was only curious..."

Now he seemed somewhat mollified. "I'm saving the Davis boy for you, so hurry with this one."

"Thank you. Thank you. very much."

He was silent. I did not open my eyes but I had the impression Payson was studying the girl closely. "A word of advice," he said "I think your trouble is giving in too soon. Making it a come-on instead of a reward—if you get what I mean."

Margo Dillon had nothing to say relative to this. She asked another question. "What about—Ambrose Whiting?"

Payson's customary pause. "He's giving me a great deal of trouble. He's a potential danger to us and can't be underestimated. I have a plan to weaken him through the girl. It should work."

Silence now, and I realized Payson had left. Margo Dillon's fingers again manipulated against my temples and it seemed that some gear meshed between my body and my brain. Immediately

there came clearer thoughts of Hugh Payson. I was mildly revolted at his hypocrisy as I remembered his words in the tavern concerning the pure in heart. Deadly duplicity. Yet—why not? It was his stock in trade as the Devil's Representative.

Margo Dillon was smiling at me as I opened my eyes. "Tonight," she said, "you are to witness a festival. This is a feast day of the Prince and the disciples taste some of the sweeter pleasures he affords his children."

She arose from the bed and the robe she wore outlined the details of her form—seemed to cling like a live thing to her body. Had she been naked it would have been less suggestive.

She went away and I lay there in a pleasant windless world where all was dreamy anticipation; where the worries and vexations of living were only nameless illusions.

The door opened and Margo Dillon again tempted me with the perfection of her body. She smiled. "Tonight you will witness some of the powers of the Prince," she said. The door closed again. After a few moments I concluded she was not coming back.

I thought dreamily of Lisa. It had been so long since I'd seen her. She seemed a dim, pleasant memory of long ago. I tried to remember where she had gone. I thought:

She must be grown up now. A woman—experiencing the joys of womanhood.

Already the rot was setting in. Already the tiny specks of it were appearing in my mind.

I slept.

"**H**AL—HAL—Hal. Listen to me. Can you hear me, Hal?" The call was drumming into my brain, endlessly; an annoying alarm clock stirring me from blissful slumber.

The voice came as an echo from

dusty and desolate places; from vast deserted halls of a mighty mansion where the furniture was thick with dust and the high rafters a haven for bats and flying night things. A ringing desolate echo from an ancient place.

"Hal — Hal-l-l-l — Halle-e-e — Halle-e-e!"

"I can hear you, Uncle Ambrose. I can hear you."

"Hal—one of my beloved."

"Is your grave cold, Uncle Ambrose? Why—why do you come? Are you unable to rest?"

"I am not in the grave, Hal. I ride the wind and when the wind is still I rest like dew on the grasses. I am in the half-world, child. I will not go. I cannot stay."

"You called me—asking for help."

"I asked for help; but you misunderstood."

"Tell me now. That was a long time ago. Tell me now."

"It is too late. You could have done much but they moved on the crest of his strength—"

"On the crest of whose strength?"

"The Prince. You are within his all-powerful circle. There is no strength within you to defeat him. You are lost."

The chill of the vast sunless place was on me—whispering across my brow. The bed beneath me was a cloud and my mind was as curious as the mind of a young child.

"Uncle Ambrose, why does Lucifer want souls? What value are souls to him? So many and so many and so many. Why does he want them?"

"Souls, my son, are of the primal stuff—the basic life stuff our scientists wonder about and seek to find and measure with their instruments. But they cannot be contained or measured."

"The substance of souls is more precious than all else because they are

of pure power. In the netherworld of Lucifer, the stuff of souls is used for sustenance. It drives the wheels of hell as sunlight sustains the planet. Satan's eternal quest for souls is like man's digging in the hills for coal and in the valleys for oil. To be without power is to perish."

"Then the identity is lost?"

"Never lost. The netherworld is a vast agony. Each soul merges with the power mass—which becomes an agony mass. All is agony as the burning of coal in blast furnaces is agony. One vast frenzy of torture forever—the torture of soul-stuff."

I felt sorry for him. "You learned all this too late, Uncle Ambrose?"

"Not too late. But I made a mistake: I allowed a moment of weakness and it was seized upon."

"What is THE BOOK OF AMBROSE?"

"My life work. I was a traitor in their camp; a spy working to defeat them. Only by knowledge could I defeat them. I gained that knowledge through the years. And I gained strength by keeping myself unstained in their midst. But they found out."

"They defeated you?"

Poor Uncle Ambrose. He had tried so hard and had been defeated. Why didn't he go away and let me alone?

"Why aren't you in the netherworld? Why isn't your soul-stuff stoking the furnaces of hell?"

"Because of the strength they could not strip from me. There are others like me. A few who must live in the narrow space between the worlds until—"

"Until when?"

His voice echoed higher and was full of agony. "It matters not so far as you are concerned. You are too weak to help me. You yourself are lost unless... unless..."

He was rather a bore, but I wanted to be polite. "Come again sometime,

Uncle Ambrose. Come when you are lonely and I will talk to you. I am very happy here."

"Nol No, Hal! No—no—no..."

The voice faded to a far echo and was gone.

I slept. But there were no dreams.

"TONIGHT we celebrate the Festival of Gath," Margo said. "Many of the faithful will be here."

It was a strange mental state into which I awoke. A lazy, rose-tinted world. It seemed that I drew a sense of happiness and well-being from the very air around me. The room in which I had slept was tastefully and expensively done: thick, shaggy, wall-to-wall carpeting; modernistic furniture done in green. And one wall was a mirror from ceiling to floor.

Margo had come to awaken me, but sleep had already vanished. She stood now beside the bed, looking down at me. The soft lighting put a breathtaking touch to her beauty.

"Where is this place—this House of Pain?" I asked.

She smiled and said, "In your mind—", then caught her lip and spoke quickly. "The Prince is most generous with his blessings. His children never want for comforts or luxuries."

I knew this was evasion—double-talk—but somehow I didn't mind. My attitude could only be described as negative. It was—for want of a comparison—as though I were the prospect of a salesman who had already sold me on his product but didn't know it. He was still trying to sell me and I recognized his false claims and evasions, but didn't care.

I was sure Margo had almost said, "*In your mind*," before she'd hastily switched her line of speech. But I was merely amused at her near-slip.

I knew this wasn't Hal Brent lying on a bed in a strange place looking up

at a beautiful woman. But that didn't matter. This was a far superior person to young Brent. Poor Hal! Such a fool. So much time wasted in cultivating the so-called finer attributes. So much wasted time.

Yet, far down in my polluted mind there was still a spark of—something. A faint, scarce-heard panic; a vaguely formed question:

In God's name—what is happening to me?

But Margo laid a hand on my forehead and the voice was stifled.

"You are to see the Festival of Gath," she said. "It is a rare privilege for an uninitiate; but I was able to arrange it."

"Where is Lisa? Where is my sister?"

"She is being well taken care of. Don't trouble yourself about Lisa."

"And Mark?"

"You will see Mark in due time."

"A good kid, Mark. A little dense at times, but a good kid."

Margo pouted prettily. "You don't seem excited about seeing the festival. Many aspirants wait for years before glimpsing its splendors. You should be thrilled."

"I am. I'm very grateful to you."

I raised my arms and Margo bent over me. But as my hands pressed against her back, she drew away, laughing. "There will be time for everything," she said. "Get ready to go with me. I will return in ten minutes."

I watched her drift from the room like a white cloud across a blue sky. Ten minutes later, when she returned, I was ready.

IT WAS a tremendous place, this House of Pain. I walked beside Margo down a long, dimly-lit hallway. At one end, its walls were of the faintest violet. But, as we moved forward,

their color deepened into lavender and finally dark purple at the far exit. Margo smiled at me and opened a door.

We were on a balcony overlooking a vast room—the ceiling of which was supported by great pillars. At one end was a dais upon which a chair had been placed; a chair covered with gleaming gold. On the wall behind the chair there hung an immense tapestry which dominated the room. Into its pattern was woven a series of Bacchanalian scenes the like of which I had never before seen. From two large pots on either side of the chair climbed spirals of lazy smoke which filled the room with a languorous incense.

There were several balconies such as the one on which we stood. On the far side directly opposite us was a somewhat larger one. Standing thereon was a girl.

She was robed in white and her bearing was that of a queen. But she was so far away I could not make out her features. I could only see the regal tilt of her head.

I touched Margo's arm. "Who is that girl?"

"It doesn't matter. The festival is about to begin."

"But I'm curious. Tell me who she is."

Margo did not answer. Then a reply wasn't necessary. I knew.

"Lisa."

"Yes—your sister."

"Let's go over there. I want to talk with her."

"It is forbidden."

I pouted like a child. "That's silly. What harm is there in talking to Lisa?"

Margo raised a hand to my face and turned it so she could look into my eyes. "Is my company boring you? Have I not enough beauty to keep you interested?"

"That's beside the point. I—"

"Shhhh! The festival is beginning."

A small door opened beside the dais and a man came out. I stared at the man and forgot about Lisa. He was tall and wore a black velvet robe that gave him stature and dignity.

"Hugh Payson!" I said.

"Yes. Satan's Representative. He will preside over the festival."

THE SIGHT of Payson stirred up uneasiness in my mind. As he crossed the dais and took his seat on the throne, I knew there was something I should remember. I had a faint recollection of being in a place where Payson and Margo discussed me as though I were a hog in a pen; as though I were a stupid lout who would have no idea of what they were talking about.

I could not remember the place or what they had said, but the small pinpoint of fear deep in my mind brightened and struggled violently to pull free of the deadly morass into which it had sunk.

I must remember! I had to remember!

But at that moment great doors opened at the far end of the hall and dozens of people rushed in. I forgot about Payson as I had forgotten about Lisa.

There were other things to fill my mind now. The people in the crowd that rushed forward toward Payson's throne.

I knew some of them!

One of the girls who passed close under our balcony was a famous moving picture actress. She appeared far younger now than when I'd last seen her on the screen, but there was no mistaking that internationally known beauty. She wore a brief crimson sash about her waist, nothing more, and her face was transfigured with ecstatic

anticipation.

Another of the girls was a waitress in the depot lunchroom at Williamsburg. I'd seen her many times. She'd waited on me often and I had admired the deep blue of her eyes.

But there was much more about her to admire now. The color of her scarf was purple, but there was no more to it than to the crimson one of the movie queen. The same look of glassy expectation upon her face.

And there were others. A man who rode the Interurban every morning. Another whose face had been plastered all over town during the election campaigns.

"I know some of these people," I muttered. "What are they doing here?"

"They have become disciples of the Prince," Margo said, "as you yourself will be a disciple. They know the soul-searing ecstasy of being born again into the pleasure-world of Lucifer."

"Then just—anybody can belong?"

"No—not anyone. Many are tested and found wanting of the courage necessary to take the last great step."

"What happens to them?"

"They—they are disposed of."

We were silent for a time and now the great throng below us lay prostrate before the throne, arms outstretched. Faces against the floor. A sudden thought came to me.

"What about the rats?" I asked.

"The rats?"

"In a dream I saw a rat sitting in front of the building at 151 River Street. There was a dead rat in our living room when they came and took Lisa. I saw another in the upper hall."

MY ARM was around Margo's waist. I felt her shudder and I glanced down to see a paleness in her face. "They are the discarded and the damned," Margo said.

I got the impression Margo had momentarily slipped out of the smooth groove through which all this ran; that she was suddenly frightened and unsure of herself.

She said, "There are souls which degenerate in the process of becoming subservient to the Prince. Souls that grow too dark and wasted to suit his purpose; souls from which the power has been burned."

There was a repetitious rhythm to her words, and for a moment she seemed to fall under a sort of melancholy spell. Her body swayed and she leaned heavily against me.

I asked, "Are you happy, Margo?"

Her body tensed and she jerked erect. She smiled a bright, feverish smile. "Watch," she said. "Soon the Prince will make his presence felt."

There was a quickening in the great room. Satan's Representative had arisen from the throne and he blessed the crouching disciples with a wave of his hand.

And even in the movement there was a suggestion of obscenity. He stepped down from the dais and stood beside it. There was a secession of all movement, all sound, as though the very air around us was waiting.

Then a roll of thunder—a flash of lightning, emanating from nowhere—and a cloud of crimson smoke puffed up around the dais. Payson, standing close, lowered his head and flung an arm over his eyes as he dropped to his knees.

Somewhere in the crowd a woman screamed—a shrill keening scream as from ecstasy or agony.

The smoke billowed and pitched, moving under discipline to form a circle of faintly pink smoke in the center of the fiery mass.

In the circle, two eyes appeared. Above them, two slanting brows came to a point, forming a V. Now a mouth

formed in the pink haze, and beyond all doubt this was Satan—the features of Heaven's outcast, Lucifer—in a wreath of crimson smoke.

A deep base voice boomed out from the throng and echoed, through the room. "The Prince! The Prince!"

And Hugh Payson, erect now, stretched forth his arms. "Behold! Madarang! Meshangra! His 'Satanic Majesty! Prince of the netherworld! Our munificent father!'"

INSTANTLY the face and the smoke vanished, but something had been done to the room and the people and the very air itself. A charging—a building-up that tore at the nerves and went singing through the blood like pure glory incarnate.

The throng below us went wild.

Margo also underwent a change. She turned on me and hers was the face of a madwoman. It twisted into an ecstatic grimace. Her open mouth loomed close to me and instinctively—frightened by her sudden ferocity—I drew back.

But not quite quick enough. Her white teeth found my shoulder and bit deep. I flung her off and stood against the balcony railing, braced for a fresh assault.

Instead of coming at me again, she also drew back, apparently in surprise. Then she was screaming out over the flood of animal-like sounds coming up from below: "You fool! You stupid lump of lifeless clay! How can you stand there insensible after the Prince has given us his blessing? Don't you understand? Only he can give forth the charge that enervates our bodies and makes them receivers for the unspeakable joy of living! This and this alone is the very height of physical sensation!"

She decided not to waste precious words upon me. She turned from the

balcony and, a few moments later, I saw her rush into the mass of devil-worshippers below.

I gaped down at them, stunned by the sight. A scene of madness indescribable was laid out below me. The brief strips of garment they had worn upon entering the hall were now flung away. Bodies were packed together and then swept apart in a wild tangle of arms and legs. The room became a well of moaning, crying, screaming, cursing humanity.

No—not that. It was past all humanity. But even in the madness, there was a pattern. A fierce blood-thirsty, flesh-thirsty design for obscene living, being, and manifesting.

A vast pattern made up of small, individual transpirations that were the threads—tiny weavings—of the unholy picture.

The scream of a girl came sharply above the other sounds. My eyes sought out the girl, to see her held prone by a man, his face pressed close to her body.

Again the scream and he drew away, leaving a trail of crimson blood. The girl writhed and appeared to be whimpering. But she recovered swiftly, to hurl herself into the closest revel and scream anew.

There was a chill in my blood as I watched. A chill over the underlying fire generated within me by the charged air.

I saw one girl lying across the body of another. Neither girl would move again. Nearby lay the twisted body of a man. He had been the object of a concentrated frenzy.

And on the dais, his arms folded, his face inscrutable, stood Hugh Payson, Satan's august representative.

My nerves were raw, bleeding—torn to shreds. I turned and ran from the balcony. I went like a panicked animal back to the sanctuary of my room, I

made it by a hair; fell on the bed; passed beyond consciousness.

A VOICE stirred me—brought me back. "Hal! My poor Hal! What have they done to you? Speak to me, Hal!"

I opened my eyes and said, "Hello, Lisa."

Lisa bent over the bed and took me by the shoulder. "Hal. Get up off that filthy floor! Let me help you. This room is dirty. You mustn't lie there."

She put an arm under me and tried to lift me from the bed. As she did so, she glanced about the room with an expression of loathing. "A dirty, bare, empty room, Hal! How did you get here?"

There was something wrong with Lisa. How else could her words be interpreted? To her there was no bed here—no fine carpets—no rich draperies.

I felt a great sadness, but there was nothing I could do. Each person sowed seed and reaped a harvest. If the seed was bad, it was no one else's fault. No man is another's keeper.

But I was curious. "Where did they take you, Lisa? What did they do to you?"

"You came here looking for me?"

"Yes, but that was a long time ago. I brought them a book."

This set my mind wandering. "It was a book Uncle Ambrose had. I think I told you about it—or maybe I didn't."

"Hal—Hal! Please!"

"I wonder what they wanted of that book?"

Lisa dropped to her knees. For a moment she looked smashed, beaten.

Then the voice on the wind, the voice out of mist: "There is nothing you can do for him, Lisa. He was too weak to stand against them. His soul is of poor stuff."

Lisa did not seem surprised by the voice of Uncle Ambrose. She came erect and I noticed the white satin gown she wore.

The voice went on: "They have worked their devil-magic upon him. They have distorted time and place and have nurtured the weaknesses in his spirit. He believes the hallucinations and lies they have put before him."

"No! That can't be!"

THESE ARROGANT people were ignoring me. In my mood of the moment, it was annoying. I said, "Pay no attention to Uncle Ambrose, Lisa. He's nothing but a whining spirit who betrayed the Prince and whose punishment is just. How did you get here, Lisa? Who brought you?"

Lisa passed through a moment of weakness. She swayed and brushed a hand across her eyes. "I—I don't know. There were three of them. They had strange powers and they were—savage. I fought, but they must have used some kind of drug. I fainted and woke up in a luxurious apartment. There were fountains and statues on golden stands."

Lisa closed her eyes and I thought she was going to faint. But she caught herself and I was relieved in not having to get off my comfortable bed and help her.

"But—but the place vanished—vanished before my eyes and it was just like this—dirty, bare, deserted."

Uncle Ambrose's voice came again, more alive now, an exultant voice: "Lisa! Lisa! If that is true, you can be saved from this. Their powers were not great enough to shackle and deceive you—"

A vague, wispy thought flickered through my mind. A scrap of conversation I had once had with someone. But so vague—and of no consequence.

The pure in heart.

"...you can leave, Lisa. You can walk out of this way-station to hell and save yourself. Go now, while there is time!"

"You could have gone away, too, Uncle Ambrose, and saved yourself. But you didn't. You fought them."

"He was a traitor," I said. "His punishment is just. To suffer in the place between the worlds—rejected by both star and pit. A thing despised by all."

They were paying no attention to me.

"I was strong, Lisa. Far stronger than you, but it was of no avail. There are so many pitfalls. So many mistakes to be made."

"He is a hypocrite," I said. "Too foul for even hell itself. He wrote THE BOOK OF AMBROSE. It disgusted even the Prince."

"No," Lisa replied, "Frightened the Prince. The book was not in honor of the Beast, but for knowledge of him. I know that now. It was to learn of the Beast and thus find the great secret of his power."

"I learned of the power, but not its secret. Take heed, Lisa, and learn from my mistakes. We are not gods—we are only human beings and Lucifer. is the power of Heaven turned to base uses. That I discovered. I learned that no mere mortal can withstand the black light of his strength."

UNCLE AMBROSE'S voice was weakening as though its heart-force were being drained away. Only a faint whisper, a complaint of the wind. Then louder: "Only God himself can be tempted by Satan and come down, uncontaminated, from the mountain."

"God does not desert his children," Lisa said.

"But only through knowledge can

they cling to him. We haven't that knowledge, Lisa. I never found it—the shield against Lucifer's thunderbolts of temptation. Go while there is time. Even Jesus faltered before that power. The Father and the Holy Ghost held tight to his hands and he still sweated drops of blood. Leave this place. Save yourself. No law requires you to give up your own soul in a losing battle."

"You gave up yours."

"I was a fool."

"Then Christ on the cross was a fool. The Christian martyrs were fools. Then our God has forsaken us. The world and all the laws are jests and it is better to be nothing."

"No—not nothing, Lisa. But remember—remember. Even on the cross Jesus said, 'My God—My God—why hast thou forsaken me?'"

"I am my brother's keeper," Lisa said.

"But it is too late. He was too weak to withstand the first and mildest of Lucifer's temptations. He has yet to be offered the power and the glory behind the power and the shining mansions beyond the glory."

"Our God will not forsake us."

"Our God sweated drops of blood, Lisa, and He Himself created the knowledge with which to fight. Go—save your own soul!"

"Our God will not forsake us."

The argument wearied me. I wanted dreams of Margo—her gentle hands—the promise of her body.

I slept. I dreamed, but not of Margo. In my dream three men came and took Lisa away.

She said, "Though I walk through the valley of death..."

They laughed.

NOT IN the dreaming, but in the warm, languorous half-world, there came Margo and Hugh Payson to confer in this rose-tinted room.

Margo laughed softly. "He is ours. Even from the first temptations. But the girl?"

Her question was tinged with a mockery, a triumph, as though she were saying: I have succeeded. You have failed.

Payson's reply was a snarl. "He was nothing from the beginning. You had no problem. Eventually he would have come asking of his own volition."

Still the mockery. "The girl is stronger—of course."

"She has a core of flint."

"Tell me—why is she so important? Does she mean so much to you?"

"To me—and the Prince. She has a power of soul rarely found."

"Whiting had such soul. You failed there."

"The circumstances were different. Lisa will be my bride. The Prince has answered my petition."

Margo gasped. "Impossible! You cannot take her against her will!"

"She will come to me willingly. She will put her hand in mine and be led into the bridal chamber and the door will be closed. Then it will be too late."

"She will never submit."

"Her purity will be her downfall."

Hugh Payson looked down at me, a sneer on his upcurved lips. "This is the Eve of Sacrilege. Tonight the power of Lucifer will give me a bride." He pointed to my bed. "You will bring this one also. Prepare him for the oath of allegiance to Lucifer."

"He needs no preparation."

"Always optimistic. You will prepare him nonetheless." Payson's cruel eyes centered upon Margo. There was great power in the eyes, and they were so eloquent they uncovered his train of thought as completely as though he had spoken. They callously ripped the clothing from Margo, leaving her naked. They expressed his understanding of her eagerness for a con-

summation under the radiance of Satan's invigorating benediction. They exposed the quivering of her flesh for the ultimate in physical sensation.

"Don't forget yourself," he said. "Hold your miserable passions in check until the deed is done. You have spoiled many and you will not have another chance if you fail again."

He left the room.

MARGO SAT down beside me on the bed. She passed gentle hands across my brow as before, but with opposite results. They no longer soothed me. Rather they seemed to clear away the pleasant mists, to bring back the ache of reality, the clarity of fear and doubt.

But all the while she was speaking softly. "We will be together, you and I. We will walk hand in hand through the pleasure labyrinths prepared for us by the Prince."

There was a chill in my heart.

"It is not all physical. The rewards of the Prince for his children transcend into the spirit as well. We will revel in the physical—rest in the mental—lie quietly and dream in the spiritual."

Still the cold fear.

"Come. Take my hand. I will show you."

My hand was in hers. The room vanished and we were imprisoned in a mist. The fear deepened. Was this the place between the worlds? Were we trapped in the nameless void from which there arose cries for help through all eternity?

My fears vanished with the mists and I raised a hand to protect my eyes from the flash of sudden brilliance.

Wealth.

The sight of it came to sweep away the tendrils of horror seeping into my mind as the grip of the devil-drag was broken.

Wealth.

We were in a cave so vast that its boundaries were lost in dim distances. And heaped in careless piles as far as the eye could see, were jewels and rare metals and shining coins. Silks, satins, tapestries; great marble statues the like of which mortal man never saw.

Margo knelt down and plunged her hand into a pile of glittering stones. "Ours—all ours."

I knew it could be nothing but an illusion. Wealth didn't exist in such profusion. I knelt and clawed both hands into the pile. I lifted two fistfuls of precious gems and squeezed until they cut into my flesh with their sharp edges.

Margo sensed my doubt. "You think all this a mirage?"

I did not answer.

She seized a great diamond in her hand, turned on me like a cat and slashed out. One facet of the stone, sharp as a lancet, drew a crimson streak on my arm. I held my arm forth stiffly, staring at the wound.

"That is your blood! Touch it! Taste it! Is it not real?"

I raised the arm to my lips. The salt taste of blood.

THIS ACTION seemed to inflame

Margo. Forgetting all else she flung herself toward me with a strange choked cry and her own lips were pressed against my flesh—seeking my blood. Her teeth bit deep.

But so far had my damnation progressed that I was not revolted. I pulled her savagely toward me and sought the warmth of her love-crazed body.

My savagery broke the spell under which she had fallen. She drew away—nay, tore away—and fell across the heap of gems. She cupped her hands and raised them up and let the stones trickle as sand over her breast.

"This is the wealth Lucifer gives his children in return for their adoration. And is such adoration difficult when the god we kneel to is so generous?"

My eyes were on Margo. I moved toward her.

"Come," she said quickly. "There is more."

Power.

The cave vanished and we were air-borne. Above were white clouds in an azure bowl. Below, a city.

There was a white temple and we descended and stood hand in hand between two giant pillars. The city was filled with beautiful white-robed people who began immediately to assemble in the square below us. They became a solid mass, untold thousands, packed shoulder to shoulder. There was a great cry, then they knelt and laid their foreheads upon the stone pavement of the square.

"We are their gods," Margo whispered. "This will be our city. As representatives of His Satanic Majesty, we will rule here side by side. Ours will be the unlimited power of life and death over these people."

And I believed. I stood there looking down at the prostrate multitudes and believed.

"You and I, Margo. Satan must love his children dearly to give them all this."

She smiled. "There is one more place to go. Come."

THE CITY vanished and we were standing upon a hill and it was as though we viewed two scenes at once. To our right was a scene of splendor indescribable—luscious green valleys stretching away toward a yellow sun. Rich fields of golden grain; fine houses and fat, sleek animals.

And, farther on, the white towers of a city, rich in promise—glittering, beckoning.

But, divided sharply from the right,

was the left. There no sun shone; there was only a sky full of dark angry clouds. The hills were barren and the whole scene was pregnant with darkness and despair.

From a frowning city there came a column of snarling, screaming people. It was led by a group of soldiers goading a blood-stained figure up a hill. In an amazingly short time the column had reached its destination and the figure was nailed to the cross.

"Here," Margo said, "are two worlds. On the right is that of Lucifer, who was flung out of Heaven because of the envy of powerful angels.

"Which would you take as your god? He on the cross—deluded, deserted by Heaven and earth alike? Or he who took his own and made for them a paradise in the netherworld—the green and golden world you see on the right?"

I looked at the bloody cross—saw a soldier sneer and raise his lance to pierce a heart. I felt sorry for the Man on the cross, but that was all.

"We must return," Margo said.

Again we were back in the rose-tinted room. I was tired and Margo's skilful fingers drew the tension from my eyes. They closed.

"I must leave you now. This is the Eve of Sacrilege. There is much to be done. Tonight you will be among the neophytes who pledge allegiance to Satan."

"Where is Lisa?"

"You will see her. Before the final pledge you will see her wedding. She will become the bride of Satan's Representative."

"Has she consented?"

"Of course. And it is well for you. Your sister in high councils. It will do you no harm."

"And Mark—Mark Davis." I tried to think. The drug no longer gripped my brain, but my mind was foggy and Mark seemed a part of the very long

ago.

"He has not as yet been given your opportunities. He is safe. You will see him in time."

I opened my eyes. Margo was standing near me and I was struck by the weariness in her bearing. Her shoulders drooped and the lines of her lovely mouth were drawn downward.

"I must go now," she said, "but I will return."

I was tired also. I wanted sleep. It seemed that all the strength had been drained from me. I dozed.

But the disembodied voice was there; not pleading now; not counseling. Cold, contemptuous. "Weak. Rotten weak. How can one embrace evil and the other stand like a granite pillar?"

"Go away, Uncle Ambrose. I am tired. Go away."

IT WAS a larger, grander place into which we went to pledge our hearts to Lucifer. A huge and stately hall with great flaming banners on every wall. The floors were of black onyx polished to mirror-smoothness.

At one end was a golden altar upon which stood a silver bowl filled with fire. The altar-cloth was of crimson with strange unintelligible words woven in black across their surfaces. Incense bloomed up in lazy spirals from bowls at either end of the altar.

Margo and I wore black velvet gowns and entered the hall through black ebony doors at the far end. We walked its length with only the company of our images in the mirror-floor.

The hall was entirely untenanted except for the two of us. And in the great stillness the hems of our gowns could be heard brushing the black onyx upon which we walked.

Margo drew me to a halt a few feet in front of the altar. "Kneel," she said.

We knelt down and the incense swirled through my brain.

"Are you ready to pledge final and complete allegiance to the Prince of Darkness?" Margo stared straight ahead. Only her lips moved. She had the most beautiful profile I had ever seen.

"Yes."

"Do you speak without any reservations whatever?"

"I do."

"You have not been coerced, nor misled? You have come of your own free will to seek the bondage of Satan?"

"I have."

"You value his august patronage even above your immortal soul?"

"Even above my immortal soul."

Margo smiled and sighed deeply. "The oath of allegiance will be read to you during the Ceremony of Sacrilege after the wedding. Your sister will then be the spouse of Satan's representative and will administer the oath herself."

At that moment two attendants, also in black robes, entered by a side door, each carrying a long ebony staff. The upper ends of the staffs were alive—the bodies of two serpents that writhed and twisted and spat forth fiery tongues.

The attendants took positions some twenty feet behind us and possibly ten feet apart. Then they crossed their staffs at the serpent-ends, allowing the reptiles to twine into a cabalistic knot.

I TURNED to watch them but Margo drew me back. "Your interest must be concentrated upon the altar," she said. "That sign is merely to bar the sufferers in the place between the worlds. This ceremony will not be desecrated by their voices nor the sound of their agonies."

"My uncle—"

"You will not hear your uncle's voice again."

That brought back a memory of the long ago. "When he died, he left a book. I had it. But I don't remember—"

"We have the book now."

"Why did you want it?"

"It was a weapon against us. All our rites—all our ceremonies. Whiting had collected them and planned to use them against us."

"As I remember, the book was rotten, obscene."

"The basic elements of life are sometimes gross and ugly, but do not trouble your mind now. Soon you will understand. Soon your eyes will be cleared."

We knelt in silence for a time. Then a door opened at the left side of the altar and a procession of proselytes entered the hall. They bore flaming torches and were dressed in black robes. They assembled on either side of the altar, knelt, and placed their foreheads on the floor.

Now from the same side came Payson, wearing rich black and gold. A glittering mitre increased his height and added somber dignity to his bearing. He mounted the steps of the altar and waited there on the left.

From the other side, through an opening covered by black curtains, came a procession of five handmaidens wearing crimson. Their faces were set, expressionless. They stared straight ahead.

And in the center of their circle was Lisa.

She was pale and her hands were clasped tightly together. But her head was high. There was no submission in her beautiful face—only contempt in her eyes.

The handmaidens brought her to a place on the altar opposite Hugh Payson. Payson raised his eyes to the

bowl on the altar. He spoke, but it was only a whisper—the movement of his lips signalling some obscene prayer.

And a figure arose from the bowl framed in a cloud of scarlet smoke. A tall, black, naked figure, shining as though carved from ebony; erect and challenging; light blazing from two burning eyes.

Payson and the handmaidens bowed low and laid their foreheads off the floor. Then Payson came erect and extended his hand toward Lisa.

I LOOKED again at my sister and saw Purity in a white shimmering gown held about her slim waist by a golden cord.

The pure in heart.

Payson said, "I offer you a seat beside me on the right hand of the Prince. I offer you this world and all the worlds above and below and beyond as far as the mind can see—out of time and space—out of human comprehension."

Lisa said, "I reject you. I despise your Prince; I loathe the disillusionment of all Lucifer's creations."

Payson's face turned dark. "You are a fool!" he roared. "All the powers of Hell are at my command!" He raised his hand and pointed to the figure arisen from the fire-bowl. "Satan himself has put all his weapons in my hands. Your purity and virginity will be mine. I can take you!"

"You cannot take me without my consent. That was the final law invoked in Heaven when Satan was cast out. Man had already been given free will—the God-spark—and the law was invoked. Only by Man's free will can he fall."

"But Satan's power lies in cunning and knowledge. His wisdom is that of truth and deceit; force and gentleness. The Alpha and the Omega of all things. I say again: put your band in

mine."

"I reject you."

Payson stepped back and there was the rolling of great thunder in the hall. The roof above us was split in two; the altar hurled backward; the crimson smoke and the ebony figure vanished.

"And all the darkness turned to flashing light. A bolt of lightning smashed Payson to the floor and a pillar of golden radiance shot down from above.

The proselytes and the handmaidens cowered in terror as—out of the golden light—a new form appeared. Encircled by a dazzling halo, the majestic figure of Christ held forth a hand toward Lisa.

"Come, my child. Your purity has saved you. God does not desert his children. Your faith and purity have been the strong weapons of your protection. You shall be the bride of Christ."

Lisa fell to her knees. The ringing tones continued. "You will, of your own free heart, become my bride."

She sobbed through her hands. "You have come: I knew you would come. My soul is—"

SOMETHING cleared in my mind. It was as though a silver dagger flew through space to cut away the cloud about me. To unstop my ears for that familiar voice from between the worlds:

"Deceit" faintly. "Deceit — deceit . . ." Even more faint until it was gone.

"And I knew!"

"Her purity will be her downfall."

"No, Lisa! No! No! It is a lie. The final lie. This is their Eve of Sacrilege. The most hideous deceit ever conceived!"

I sprang from my place beside Margo and was between Lisa and the

golden figure. I reached forth and tore away the white robes; clawed down the beautiful mask. The robes fell to the floor and the shining black body of Lucifer stood revealed.

"The final deceit. But by the law all was staked upon it. When man or devil gambles and loses, the price must be paid. The place about us vanished.

All save Lisa and Payson and Margo disappeared before my eyes in a swift, foul disintegration that left only dust on the floor—

And we were in a dirty, bare room I had known before at 151 River Street, while disintegration continued.

Lisa was in my arms as we watched—terrified. Watched. Margo and Payson writhing on the floor—fading—slipping away—becoming mist until—

Two rats squealed and snarled in one corner of the empty room.

I killed them with my feet. I kicked them to death even as their sharp white teeth sought my flesh.

LISA WAS sobbing in my arms.

Again she was the Lisa I knew. Slacks—saddle shoes—sweater. I held her close and the sobbing lessened somewhat. "You saved me. You had the knowledge. If it hadn't been for you—"

"Uncle Ambrose saved us both," I replied. "His knowledge, your strength. I was only a tool. He saved us both."

Lisa raised her head and looked around the dismal room. "Where is Mark? Didn't he come here with you?"

We found him lying unconscious in another of the rooms. He came out of it slowly and up like a groggy fighter to stand swaying in Lisa's arms.

"What happened? I must have been stugged. My head—"

"It's all over now, darling. All done

with and there is something you must promise me."

His eyes were clearing. "Lisa—Hal."

"Promise me you will never ask. All this must be forgotten. Promise you will never ask me or refer to this again."

Mark shuddered. "Let's get out of here."

We went down out of 151 River Street and passed the night-darkened houses as we walked toward the lights of the more active thoroughfares.

It was raining and we had trouble finding a cab that would take us home. It was a long trip, and between us Mark and I had just enough money with none to spare.

We left Mark at his gate and walked on toward our house. But we did not turn in. At the gate Lisa took my arm and led me on.

"There's something we must do," she said.

"What?"

"Come with me."

We walked on toward the edge of town, through the outskirts, and into the country.

To the cemetery.

It was still raining, and we could scarcely find our way among the tombstones.

To a new grave covered with wilted

flowers drenched by the cold and melancholy rain.

We knelt beside Uncle Ambrose's new-made tomb.

"He saved us," Lisa whispered, "and we must save him."

"From the place where he lies in agony. The place between the worlds."

"Pray. Pray for his immortal soul."

We prayed while the skies opened with renewed fury and the rain smashed down on the earth. We prayed while the heavens were split with gout of lightning. It was as though Satan and Heaven—good and evil—battled in the sky for a precious soul.

We prayed.

Until the rage of the infinite was spent; until the thunder and the rain and the lightning were gone. Until the clouds broke and the moon came to give a benediction and there was peace.

We arose from the grass and Lisa's face was somehow transfigured. "I heard him," she said. "I heard his cries of hopelessness and pain. Then they ceased. They were gone and there was only quiet—just as the storm was finishing."

She took my hand. "We can go now. He rests in peace."

We went hand in hand out of the graveyard and home.

THE END

That's Fast, Brother!

By
Dale Lord

WHEN YOU talk of conventional cameras you think of shutter speeds in terms of hundredths of a second—and they're fast. When you speak of scientific photography you think of shutter speeds of the order of ten thousandths of a second—and that really is fast. The first kind depends on mechanical arrangements, the second on photo-flash techniques and stroboscopic methods.

But none of these methods can approach the fantastic speed of the Kerr cell tripped by an electric charge. Here is a shutter which is thought of in terms of millionths of a second or less! It is a shutter and lens system combined, and it is opera-

ted by the discharge of an electric condenser—similar to a large radio type—through it. That jolt of electricity is enough to open the planes of polarization of the crystalline material for that tiny fraction of a second.

Such a device hasn't much application to conventional photography but in the realm of scientific research it is just what the doctor ordered. Molecular and atomic phenomena occur in the order of fractions of a microsecond;—perhaps using such a combined superspeed lens-shutter system, actual pictures can be made directly of phenomena we dare only hint at—such as the collision of two molecules!

WRESTLERS ARE REVOLTING

**In a world where there was only one
spectator sport, anything was sporting**

JOHNNY BELL was born in the last decade of the twentieth century. The world he grew up in wasn't particularly happy, but it was still a pretty good world for the kids. A kid doesn't need a lot to make him happy: just the sun and the breeze and some dirt to get himself smeared with, and once in a while a piece of pie, a soft drink. If there's a trivideo set in his home, as there was in Johnny's, so much the better. He's even happier. Maybe his parents don't laugh very frequently, but if they've



By Geoff St. Reynard



"You're gonna start flying apart," panted The Chimera. "I'll sprinkle your toes around."

never laughed much within his memory, how's he to know that seriousness—even melancholy—ain't the natural grown-up attitude on life?

That trivideo set influenced Johnny Bell beyond his family's expectations. He watched the wrestlers three times a week and admired their physiques and flamboyant acrobatic stunts, so when he went to college eventually, he took up wrestling as his gymnasium credit. There wasn't much choice, just wrestling or calisthenics or long-distance running.

In his second year, at the college Johnny, a lanky, tow-headed, bright-eyed beanpole of a young man, decided to major in literature. He wanted to write books. He was a great reader, was Johnny.

He put in his application for the literature major, and four days later was visited by a couple of gentlemen clad in the violent hues of magenta and heliotrope that were the current favorites among the less conservative set. These two gentlemen, who rapidly proved to be gentlemen only in the sense that they were not ladies, told Johnny that they represented the government, which was called the parliament of rulers, of the Federated Americas. It seemed he had attracted attention in the intercollegiate wrestling matches, and the Commission for Sport had been favorably impressed with his potentialities. So Johnny's application for a literature major had been turned down by the college, under orders from the parliament of rulers; and he was to major in wrestling.

Johnny Bell was stunned. He said he wasn't going to be a professional wrestler, that he'd never thought of such a thing, that he wanted to write.

"Look, kid," said one of the gentlemen, "if you wanna write, you can write letters. Between bouts. See?"

Of course there was no appeal. He

tried to object, but it was an order from the government, so that was that.

He was shattered. He cursed the government and the wrestlers who had charmed him with their skill and the trivideo set on which he'd seen them and the man who invented the wonderful three-dimensional television in the first place. He let his studies lapse in hopes that he would be expelled from school.

NOTHING was of any avail. Naturally. What the parliament of rulers said was the law. His schedule was adjusted so that he could take augmented and intensive wrestling training. It was explained to him in a sugary official letter that there was an insatiable demand for wrestlers, as was natural in a society which had only the one spectator sport, and that he was extremely fortunate to have attracted attention so early in his career. If he worked hard he might even become one of the favored few who were sponsored by the government itself. A great new life was opening out for him.

That is the way things were. No appeal. No possibility of going away and becoming an anonymous digger of ditches, or an explorer, or a fireman, or a writer. There wasn't police surveillance or anything so crude; but with the government controlling all transportation, all jobs, all careers and play and in fact everything but thought, Johnny knew at last that he had to make the best of his fate and become a professional wrestler.

So he studied with the masters, some of whom were so old they could remember the days before the Americas were federated. From them he absorbed knowledge of his trade, and of—the underground.

When he came to graduate and en-

ter the ranks of the pros, he was a very good wrestler. He had filled out and hardened, and was one of the best young men in his profession.

And his mind and soul were brimful of hatred; which was a good thing, because the things he hated were evil—tyrants and tyranny—the government that could tell a man what to do with his life, the cruelties of its Special Action Police and its multitudes of spies, the stupid lassitude of the people who accepted such rulers....

Johnny listened, and thought, and hated. He hated so intensely that often he could not sleep at night. And he built two reputations, a public one as a wrestler, a secret one as a fierce and tireless leader of the underground.

It was in the interests of both these fields of activity that he sat down, one evening of late April, 1919, and turned on his trivideo set; the image smoothed out, deepened, and Ted Brown the popular announcer was pouring his rich oily tones into Johnny's ear.

AH, YES, ladies and gentlemen (said the announcer in his most slippery, soapy, unctuous voice), this is the last fall coming up, the last fall of the main event of tonight's grappling contests.

One fall has gone to Rippling Richard Rivers, that brawny, cleancut lad in the green morocco leather harness with silver studs; he won it with a snap mare, a body slam and a body press. The second fall went to the champion of the Federated Americas, The Chimera, who took that one with a step-over toe hold. He's the fellow wearing jet black harness with shiny black studs; he's bald, his head is a blunt dome of tight brown skin, his eyes are piercing green, and sometimes they may look just a little crossed to you, fans, but I think that's when he

wants to see two ways at once, for I tell you this champion is on the ball, on—the—good—old—ball.

The champion has had thirty-four matches without one defeat. And what's more, as you all know, he has never let one of his-foemen leave the ring alive! Yes sir, the champion kills them all, each and every one, with that curious hold he invented called the Siberian death lock. Of course it's perfectly legal to kill a man in the ring if you can, it makes an interesting game, and (here the announcer became so oleaginous in tone that he sounded as though his mouth were full of butter) it must have been pretty dull in the old days when all you were allowed to do was pin your antagonist's shoulders to the mat. Imagine, nobody ever getting killed in the ring. Pretty dull, that's all your boy at the mike can say, pub-ritty dull. Naturally you can't see a man killed every night here at the Broadway Arena, or there wouldn't be any more wrestlers after a while, ha-ha-ha! But you know and I know that when The Chimera climbs in the ring, there's going to be mur—homicide done. Yes sir.

Well, nobody has escaped the Siberian death lock yet, but there's always a first, and I guess that's what every challenger keeps telling himself. Of course the parliament of rulers wouldn't have sponsored the champion two years ago if they hadn't known—if they hadn't believed he was darn near undefeatable. We were all sorry when Gorgon Gus, the previous champion, was foully assassinated by somebody in Chicago, but the present champion is a worthy successor to Gorgon Gus' crown, yes sir. The parliament of rulers can be mighty proud of their boy.

(The gong rang for the third fall. Now a surf of hideous sound came up to beat on the ring, and in it you

might have heard lust for blood, and great hatred, and perhaps, if you were keen of ear, an undercurrent of terror. Thus the Roman rabble once shouted in the great amphitheatres.)

THEY COME out rushing. That's what two mad-bulls would look like if they could move as fast as jectars—oh, oh!—Rivers grabbed the champ's right arm and flipped him over. In that old standby, the Irish whip. He could have a try at pinning him right away, but he follows him down and puts a body scissors on him—fans, he's got him set up for the most humiliating hold of all, and The Chimera isn't going to like this one bit, but Rippling Richard is going to put him through the mill, right through the good old mill, with a giant seat crusher, otherwise known as the reverse piledriver, the big drop, and other names too numerous and embarrassing to mention. This hold is not only painful to the back of the lap, but it's about the most mortifying, the most humbling hold I know. The champion's in a very inglorious position. Now Rivers lifts him up—all by the power of those terrific legs of his, now he—cof!—he brings him down to the mat with a slam. Man, that shook the whole Arena! The Chimera's as mad as a teased scorpion. He's really shorn of his glory at this minute. Imagine, ladies and gentlemen, what it would feel like if somebody was picking you up and slamming your sitting region down on the canvas like that. I'm glad it's not me up there in that body scissors.

Now The Chimera's inching for the ropes, hurling himself with all the muscles at his command and, brother, the champion's got muscles from the top of his head to the soles of his feet and he's straining 'em all at this moment. There goes another giant seat

crusher, a-wham! The champion is crimson in the face and I'll bet he's pretty crimson elsewhere, too. Now he's made the ropes. He's under them, the ref says break it up, and they do.

They're in the center, circling each other, and the champ is mad, m-a-d mad. He goes into a razzle-dazzle set-up, rushing from side to side of this big twenty-foot-square ring, bounding off the ropes, back and forth, Rippling Richard just stands there watching, sort of contemptuously; and now there's a fast drop kick and it catches Richard right in the face and he's down.

The champ hauls his foe right up and into a bear hug. Is The Chimera going to end the match? He's chest to chest with Rivers, he's holding him tight against that barrel of a chest with the right arm holding Rivers' left up in a tight hammer-lock against the challenger's back, and with his left hand The Chimera—ohmygod yes, this is it! The Chimera puts two fingers up to the corners of his left eye, and what that signifies nobody can figure out except that it's the champion's macabre signal that he's going to kill his opponent! Like an Indian's war whoop, I guess, or a kind of self-made thumbs-down sign from the gladiator instead of the Caesar.

Rippling Richard smashes his right fist into the champion's belly, he knows that signal and he's scared; The Chimera tightens his arm lock and they're face to face and chest to chest and that's it, he's done it, whatever the hell it is—pardon my language, but he's applied that fabulous, unseeable, incomprehensible grip of his and although all he seemed to do was press his opponent to his chest in a kind of half-applied bear hug—

Rippling Richard sags and falls to the mat and I can tell you now, though

the official verdict isn't in, I can tell you with assurance that the challenger is stone cold dead in the grappling ring!

Well, fans, that's that for another evening of top-flight wrestling at your favorite sport spot and mine, the Broadway Arena, where you see the best, the finest, the absolute acme of wrestling. Yes sir. We hope you'll be trivideeing our way tomorrow night. This is your pal, Ted Brown, saying a good good night, sports fans!

.... Yeah, he's dead all right. (The announcer's voice was suddenly honest, not at all soapy.) That big hunk of suet hasn't left one alive yet. How the hell does he do it, Joe? That's no killing hold he gets on 'em. Poor old Dickie! Number thirty-five! He was one of the best, by God. But he would go in there and try his luck. You'd think by now they'd all realize they haven't got a prayer against the parliament of rulers' crummy butcher—

Holy hell, Joe, look at your main switch! Is that mike still on?

I hope I haven't been on the....

THREE MEN came into the room.

Two of them were ordinary, men you could not have picked out of a crowd even if you had seen them commit a murder. The third was a great burly ox of a man, with flaming hair and the broken features of a long-time pro wrestler. His name was Mike O'Rourke, and he was billed for his matches as the Sinister Oriental, because he was strictly a gag man in the ring. In private life he was inclined to be moody and read a good deal, Schopenhauer and Freud and Confucius.

There were perhaps a dozen men already gathered in the room, which was a headquarters of the revolutionary underground movement. Some of the men were middle-class, average

men, men to be passed on the streets without a glance, anonymous men seen standing in bars drinking beer and wine; while four or five of them were unmistakably wrestlers. These last were brawnier than their fellows, taller and more easily remembered. One of them was the Indian Jagga-nath, who used a modified form of *kushati*, the Hindu wrestling style. He wore a tight gray turban, his features were beautiful, and his eyes were ovals of glittering jet. Beside him was the bearded pseudo-Arab, Hassan Ben Aroun; and with them was Prince Steve, undisputed champion of the west side of the sixty-nine hundred block of Marlow Avenue.

When the three men came in, all conversation ceased. Mike O'Rourke closed the door and somebody said, "You were there?"

"Yes," said Mike, "we were there. He killed Dickie."

"We saw it on the set here. That damned mealy-mouth Ted Brown! 'It must have been pretty dull back in the old days when nobody ever got killed, puh-ritty dull.' I'll bet he drinks a quart of liquid soap before every performance to get that tone."

"Didn't you hear him flare up at the end, Tom?" asked a tall blond man who had come in just before the last three.

"What d'you mean? We turned it off as soon as Dickie got his."

"Brown thought he was off the air," and said something about the parliament of rulers' butcher and how nobody had a chance against him. Swore, realized that he was talking to a few million people, and almost gagged before his engineer threw the switch."

"That explains it," said one of the nondescript men with Mike O'Rourke. "Four of the Saps—" this was the nickname of the Special Action Po-

lice "—shouldered in and hauled Brown away."

"I'd hate to be in his shoes," said the tall, blond man, who was Johnny Bell. "He really blew off some steam. I forgave him all that unctuous oil when I heard it. If he gets himself pardoned, I'm going to have a quiet chat with him."

"I wish we'd heard it," said Tom thoughtfully. "Ted Brown... Who'd have thought it! One of the rulers' favorite mikemen."

"Well," said Mike O'Rourke, "if anybody can talk himself out of the condemned cells, Ted Brown can; he's got the gift of gab."

THERE WAS a silence. The newcomers found seats around the wooden tables and lit brown-paper cigarettes. Then Jagganath the Hindu said, "Who'll be the next to challenge this assassin?" His accent was English, but his eyes were deep wells of Asian night.

"Well," said Mike O'Rourke, the Sinister Oriental, "I will."

"No," said Johnny Bell. He stood up, as tall as a pine among them, and began to pace back and forth. His hair was an unruly corn-colored shock, his eyes vivid sky-blue; his six-foot-four frame was made of muscle and bone and energy. He was the chief of this unit of the underground. "No," he said; "I'm done with this hit-or-miss business of sacrificing men without a plan."

"But we've had a plan for years," said Hassan Ben Aroun, whose real name was Bob Szybricki. "We made it long before you joined us, Johnny, and you know it. There are factions at work in the government, factions in industry; packs of us howling in the newspapers—" *howling rather quietly*, murmured Prince Steve—"and mobs of us burrowing at the founda-

tions of the whole filthy structure. Every unit has its job, and ours is to dethrone the parliament of rulers' champion of wrestling. I know we haven't found his secret—"

"We found out Gorgon Gus' secret," growled one of the small ordinary men. "He had a specially-designed killray cylinder and mechanism hidden in his harness behind a stud. There was no defense and our efforts to expose him failed, so we assassinated him."

"Yes, and then managed to institute the custom of having the harnesses checked by the referee before every bout, so that that method of murder was scotched. Thank the powers for incorruptible referees!" Johnny Bell nodded. "Yet The Cbinger has even fought stark, naked in stag matches, and eliminated some good boys."

"But we are trying, Johnny. You can't say we aren't trying."

"I know, old fellow, I know. That wasn't quite what I meant. I'm just sick and tired of sending in our men to die while we stagger around in the dark wondering how the slob does it. And sometimes when you can't see the work the other units are doing, you start thinking maybe they aren't doing anything at all."

A man stood up in a far corner. He was very old, so old that his gray face seemed to have turned to stone, in the ridges of which two eyes of pale agate moved slowly from side to side. He was one of the last of the ancient wrestlers, a man skilled in many styles: North Country, judo, the *glima* of Iceland, Greco-Roman.

"I remember when I held the championship of the world," he said, and his voice was still strong and full. "I would enter the ring and the announcer would cry out, 'I give you the noblest Roman of them all—Julius Squeezer!' Because my name was

Caesar, Enrique Caesar, they called me by that ring name. I fought many matches, at last retiring with the championship. Then arose the parliament of rulers, and slowly the other sports were obliterated, until only that was left which they called wrestling. No other sport had offered the opportunities for them to prove to the people how irresistible, how unconquerable, how ruthless they were. They could scarcely take a baseball team and by arranging for it to win every game, show their own omnipotence. That would have been purely silly. They could not sponsor polo teams or football teams for the same reason; and boxing had declined so in favor that it was not feasible. So they chose wrestling, and in it as in many other fields and professions they sponsored a champion who could win each time and so water the seed of the lie implanted in the brain of the people—the lie that the parliament of rulers was invincible!”

“Very true,” said Mike O'Rourke.

“I tell this old tale to show you, Johnny Bell, that we in this unit of the underground are as important as anyone in the world. I think you begin to doubt it. See, if we can beat this killer, this Chimera who could not have stayed ten minutes with me in my prime—if we can find his secret and beat him, and show to the people how he and the slimy men he represents have won, through trickery, deceit, and a great rampart of lies, then we will have shown them that the parliament of rulers can be beaten likewise.”

BUT WHEN you listen to them howling,” said Johnny Bell, “when you see those gaping, blood-thirsty faces cheering The Chimera—”

“Are they cheering him or shouting for his downfall?” The ancient wrest-

ler grinned slowly. “Has a generation or two bred all the decency and fair play out of the race? I think not! Listen, Johnny. This wrestling is a kind of allegory, a play of the fight between good and evil. In the old days evil sometimes won, and good sometimes; but the people by and large cheered for good. A handful of years under the parliament of rulers cannot have changed them so much, those people in the seats of the arenas!”

“The allegory always says now that ‘you can’t beat the tyrants,’ said Jagganath. “I want to explode that allegory in their faces.”

“But sometimes,” said Johnny, “I get to thinking what a damned little facet this wrestling business is of the whole dirty mess that the Americas are in, and I think we’d be doing better if we were out in the streets tossing bombs at the tyrants’ jetcars. It’s just inactivity that makes me feel this way. And I’ll tell you how I’m going to cure it. I’m going to challenge the champion.”

“Johnny,” said Enrique Caesar, “you are good, but not that good. You are not ready yet, even supposing we knew his secret.”

“Nevertheless, I’m going to do it. I’ll have three or four weeks to get in shape, and to figure out the Siberian death lock. That’s enough time. That’s all the time I can stand. If I stagnate much more, I’ll disintegrate from concentrated in exertion.”

“I will train you, then,” said Caesar reluctantly.

“We’ll all help,” added Jagganath. “I know your feeling of inadequacy, Johnny, and I respect it. You’ve got to do something with your hands to prove to yourself that this work we’re at isn’t a farce. Tom, will you arrange it for us?”

Tom Kincaid, the prompter, said, “I’ll fix it up. But I don’t like sacri-

ficing the leader of our unit."

"I just might beat him," suggested Johnny Bell diffidently.

"You know better than that," growled Tom.

"Stand up a minute, Mike," said Johnny to the Sinister Oriental. "Put an imitation of that Siberian death lock on me."

Mike O'Rourke unwound his bulk and obligingly put a hammer lock on his friend's left arm. They stood toe to toe and Johnny considered. "Don't forget that fool motion he makes with his left hand." Mike put two fingers athwart his left eye and made a face. "Why does he do it? What fantastic idea possesses him? He could be crushing the other fellow in a real bear hug, but he wastes his left arm in that silly gesture. I don't get it! Anything else he does?"

"He grunts," said Mike. "Because the other guy's always belting him in the stomach."

"Yes, I have my right arm, free. Given a few seconds I could get out of this hold. But by then, I'm dead."

"Why don't you break out of it at once?" asked Jagganath. "Feel that you're in the ring, now, and the Chimeras puts that silly-looking hold on you. Why don't you knee, fork cut, or slip away?"

Johnny thought. "I've seen plenty of good men die in this hold; maybe I feel the coldness coming over me and I can't move."

"Dickie moved," said Mike. "He hit him in the guts."

"But he wasn't quick enough. He died."

"How?" hissed Jagganath. "How did he die, Johnny?"

JOHNNY BELL stood there in the grip of the big wrestler and bit his lips and snorted through his nose. Then he said, "I don't know. He died

without a mark on him that anyone could see, without a bone broken, in a fraction of a second. How? I've thought of every muscle and every move, and I don't know."

There was a sound of shouting in the street below. One of the men ran to the door and opened it. He slammed it after a single glance. "SAPS," he said. "Let's go."

"I'll see you at Caesar's place in the Catskills," said Johnny Bell, drawing an illegal killray pistol from the back of his belt. "Mike, we'll cover. The rest of you, get going!"

Already the secret door was wide, and the men were sliding through into darkness. At the other door, fists banged with arrogant authority. "Open up," roared somebody, "in the name of the parlia—"

Johnny shot through the door twice, the killray pistol silent and deadly in his hand. Jagganath went into the dark and there were only four of them left. The other door smashed off its hinges.

Johnny dropped two of the Special Action Police and fired over their bodies into a mass of oncoming figures. Mike, who owned a noisy old-fashioned automatic, had already shot out the lights, and they stood in a murky gloom. The doorway was full of cursing men; shattering wood and the cracking of Mike's gun made a staccato background of noise against which the shouts and groans laced through each other to produce a cruel symphony.

Johnny's cheek was burned by the force-stream of a killray pistol. "Close," he said to himself, feeling glad that—although the killrays were deadly as lightning when they caught you anywhere at all, and gave the sensation of great heat when they only came close—they left no mark on the skin, no wound or burn to disfigure

you. Their force-streams acted directly on the blood, which carried their poison (or was it simply a changed structure of the blood itself?) to the heart so that you died within seconds, never knowing what had hit you.

He spilled a Special Action Policeman back over the little pile of bodies fired into the gaping white face of another who was leaping at him, and bellowed at Mike to run.

"You too, then." A hand whose power no one could have fought came through the dusk and hauled Johnny Bell backwards. Johnny fired a last bolt of force past the closing door and then he was standing in blackness, listening to his friend panting beside him. "Sure, that was a close one. Think they knew us?"

"No, Mike, you were too quick with those lights. Come on, this barrier should keep 'em busy for a while."

They ran through the nighted tunnel, guiding themselves with fingertips that brushed the walls. At the other end they emerged on the starlit bank of a wide river. "See you in the Catskills."

"Luck, Johnny."

When the Special Action Police at last came out of the tunnel, the riverbank was calm and silent and deserted as a tomb.

JOHNNY BELL ducked between the ropes and dropped to the ground beside the ring. The sun dappled his face with shadows of the tall trees' leaves. He said, "Hello, Jagganath. All set for tomorrow?"

"More than you could guess, Johnny. To begin with, I've tagged you with a new name."

"I know, we saw the announcement on trivideo. One more ox for the scarlet slaughter! Where'd you ever get that name?"

"Bellerophon the Great? Out of

myth, old boy," said Jagganath, looking pained. "I'm astounded at your ignorance."

"But why? I've been wrestling under my own bundle for—"

"Bellerophon was the warrior who slew the original Chimera."

"Oh! That's okay. What is a Chimera?"

"Never mind." Enrique Caesar was passing them. "How does he look, sir?" asked the Indian.

"As good as he ever will. His muscles are fine, but he hasn't enough fat to cushion them from harm. He'll be hurt. As usual."

"Who's the ref?" asked the blond young leader.

"Paul Bearer."

"Good man. Incorruptible even by the parliament of rulers. I only wish he didn't have that ominous name."

"What?" said Jagganath, startled. "Oh, I see. Pallbearer. One for you. I confess I'd never noticed it."

"What else is set for tomorrow, Jagganath?"

"Well," the Hindu hesitated, "I don't know that I should tell you. You'll have enough to think about in the ring. I'll only say that you absolutely have to win." The deep black eyes snapped. "See?"

"I have to win, sure, or I'm a dead pigeon. And that weighs with me a little, without knowing your secrets," said Johnny. "But I was the guy that said we couldn't go on without a plan, remember? And here I am about to charge into the ring with the champion, and I still haven't a vestige of a plan in my head. So if there is one, you'd better tell me. Besides, it isn't quite fitting to keep your leader in the dark when you know something."

Jagganath offered him a cigarette. "Johnny, there was a plan long ago. It took you into account, though you were unheard of."

"Elucidate, son."

"I mean by that, that we knew one day a man would beat The Chimera, or whoever happened to be the parliament's champion at the time. We laid our plans accordingly, plans only a handful of us knew in detail. I've told our leaders that you're the man we've watched for. You've got to keep me from being a disastrous liar."

JOHNNY lit his cigarette, and then Jagga-nath's. Caesar came back and the Indian gave him one. "I remember when cigarettes were white," said the old man sadly, staring at the brown tube.

"Why me, Jagga-nath? Why not one of the dozens before me?"

"Ah! I've asked myself that numerous times. I don't quite know. Except that there's something in you, a tautness, a tense blazing purpose that makes me have confidence in you; Johnny."

"I wish I had," said Johnny Bell.

"You do. You know you have no thought of dying in that ring."

"No... I haven't. But neither had Dickie Rivers."

"You must keep out of the Siberian death lock," said Caesar. "I, who know every hold ever used in wrestling, tell you this: there is a trick to it, not of the muscles, but of some treacherous—"

"Gimmick," suggested Jagga-nath softly.

"Exactly. I know holds that none of the wrestlers today would recognize. I have taught you a few—the Argentine backbreaker, the tomahawk, the cobra twist, the Oklahoma hayride, the crocodile clutch. But this Siberian death lock—no, no, it is no proper hold. There is a gimmick. So you will be circumspect. At first sign of a bear hug you will do anything to break it, even if you must foul. Fork

cut his eyes, anything; it should not be difficult to avoid such a puny-seeming hold." The old man sighed. "This is what I told Rivers, and Suffering Sam, and The Gripping Greek From Martinique, and many others. Always they answered me: Yes, Caesar, I will keep out of it. Always they did not. Inexplicable! Why do they die?"

"What if The Chimera has a confederate in the audience?" asked Jagga-nath. "A man with a killray, who shoots the poor devil on signal—the signal of the eye? But the audience is searched at the door for weapons. And the SAPS couldn't do it without being seen. Besides, sooner or later even a dead shot would graze the champ, and a killray graze is *finis*. How does he do it?"

"Dunno," said Johnny Bell, and "Yes," said Caesar, "me too, I dunno."

The three men had strolled across the ground to a bench where Mike O'Rourke sat cleaning and assembling a killray pistol. "Is one of you standing on the cell from this thing?" asked Mike then. "I can't find it. Must have rolled off my knee."

Johnny bent and picked up a tiny cylinder of silver metal with four small knobs projecting from it. "This it?"

"Thanks. That's the heart of this thing. All the rest is trimming and show."

"That mite is the power?" Johnny was intrigued. "I never saw one taken apart before. How's it work?"

"DO YOU THINK I could explain it to a mere wrestler?" asked the Sinister Oriental. "But maybe I can simplify it for you. In that little cell is an atom, and sitting on the atom there's a bad fairy. When you pull the trigger a tiny needle comes out and punches the fairy in the tail, and he bites the atom, and an atomic ray

shoots out from the atom, which is naturally enraged at the bite. Go soak your head. How do I know what happens? All I know is it's a killray power cell, and with its ability to create fatal and instantaneous heart attacks I can knock over SAPS for the next twenty years without recharging its doggone battery. Also it won't leave messy holes in people, like my old automatic does. Very neat instrument. Any more fatheaded queries?"

"Sorry," said Johnny. "Just asked. What are the knobs?"

"Three of them attach to the walls of the pistol's cavity, to hold the thing steady; the fourth is threaded to a wire that comes up from the trigger. It's the only truly important one. The other three are stationary and simply hold the cell likewise."

"What won't they think of next?" murmured Johnny, and the three took their way toward the house, leaving Mike to swear and fumble with his great thick fingers at the tiny blob of deadliness.

"He expecting a brawl?" asked Johnny.

"I cleaned my own guns last night," said Jagganath obliquely. "Everyone is a little tense, a little expectant. Who can say what will happen soon? The air is electric."

"Talk sense, Jaggy. I've been up here in the hills for three weeks, but I've been watching trivideo. There's trouble everywhere. The newscasters don't specify it, but you get the feeling. What's coming? What's my fight the signal for?"

"Don't get feeling important," said Jagganath. "You are, but don't feel it. There's unrest all over the continents—yes, even an abortive revolt in the State of Uruguay. The underground knows about it, even if the common folk don't. Go have a shower. Don't burden your mind. I've chattered too

much already." He shut his mouth and would not speak again.

JOHNNY BELL stood in his corner waiting for the gong. Jagganath was with him, talking in a low urgent voice: "Johnny, you've got to win. I don't care how you do it. If you want to break his neck, go ahead. But win for us, son, win for us. And if it's possible, find out his secret, his gimmick."

"I get the idea that this match is the signal for a general uprising," said Johnny, eyeing The Chimera across the ring. "But if it were, surely you'd tell me about it? And why should you know and not I? When I'm leader." He turned his gaze on the Hindu. "I have a vague feeling that you're the leader here, Jaggy," he said, "and I'm just a blessed little puppet on a dark string."

"Not a puppet, Johnny, but a match to light the powder train. Yes, you may as well know now. The revolution begins tonight."

"And if I lose?"

"Oh, we go on with it, but a lot of impetus will be lacking. I don't think you appreciate how much this Chimera stands for in the eyes of the people. They've only one sport, Johnny, and he's the big figurehead of it. If he falls, and they're shown that he was up there because of treachery and evil, just as his masters are, it'll be a powerful incentive for them to rise once and for all, or to accept our insurrection, at least. You'll have slain an ogre and shown them that ogres can die."

"And why do you know all about it when I'm supposed to be unit leader of the wrestling faction?" asked Johnny levelly.

"Well, you see, son, I'm the head of the whole revolutionary underground, and tonight I try for my coup.

d'état. I've waited a long and weary time for it. Often I thought I'd go mad if I didn't challenge this beast myself, but I was always voted down by my partners. You may wonder why I chose to attach myself to the wrestling unit. It was because I felt it to be the most important. To strike our primary blow in the field where most of the people will see it and appreciate its significance, that was the thing I wanted to do. How few men in the street know the politicians' names—and how many know the name, the face, the every move of The Chimera!"

Johnny Bell gaped, then grinned. He had felt out of things these past weeks, as if everyone had lost confidence in him; now he knew he was trusted beyond his fellows, even beyond such old-timers in the movement as Mike O'Rourke and Prince Steve and Tom Kincaid, who had no idea who was master-minding the revolt. He would have babbled his thanks, being so tense and keyed-up that he could not have helped it. But at that moment the gong sounded. Bellerophon the Great tipped his friend a wink and bounded out into the ring.

WARILY HE circled The Chimera, noting the terrible bulk of the man; though they were evenly matched as to height, the champion outweighed him by seventy pounds. Johnny had more finely toned muscle. The Chimera more cushioning-fat. The eyes of the champion, piercing green and slightly crossed, blazed out of a brown ugly face, its nose smashed nearly flat, its ears big blobs of shapeless flesh flanking the blunt egg-bald skull. Johnny glanced from the sparkling thick lips down over the big body to the black studded harness. He settled his own harness of blood-scarlet morocco leather more comfortably about his loins. There were no orna-

ments, no metal studs on it. It was as simple and honest and straightforward as Johnny Bell himself.

The Chimera halted and shook his fists at Johnny. They looked like gnarled brown rocks, as big as skulls. "Come and rattle, you gutless wonder!" roared The Chimera. "Get offa your bicycle!"

They closed and the champion put an arm strangle on Johnny. Exerting quick strength, he pulled out of it. The Chimera yelled angrily. "Ref, ref, he's got grease on him!"

Paul Bearer slid his hands over Johnny's arms. "He's all right. Wrestle."

Again they closed and their hands fought for position. "Listen, baby," growled The Chimera, his breath foul in Johnny's nostrils, "I'm gonna kill you, see? Aah!" He grunted as Johnny belted him with a forearm. "Now I'm gonna tear little pieces offa you, baby. I'm gonna spread you all over this ring before I kill you."

Johnny knocked down the huge arms and snatching at the bald dome put a bead chancery on his enemy and twisted him around in the air; The Chimera flopped heavily to the mat. Johnny was on him with a vicious knee drop to the back of his neck. The Chimera hawled wrathful invective, writhed sideways and came up to slam into a bear hug. Johnny heard his own ribs creak. He smashed down at the tightskinned head, and the champion, laughing, bored into Johnny's face with his skull. Johnny gripped the head between clenched fists and wrung it briskly, in terror lest his chest be crushed in that awful hug. With his forearm he battered The Chimera's left eye. The other loosened his hold and stepped back.

"Now you start flyin' apart," panted The Chimera, "Now I sprinkle your fingers and toes all over the place."

THE NEXT fifteen minutes were a nightmare. Johnny was strong, perhaps even stronger than the other; but he was handicapped by the habits of four pro years of fighting fairly, and by the tremendous weight of The Chimera. He fell before a dozen attacks, gamely beat his way out of them, was bruised and buffeted and hurled about until he felt that he must be fighting a veritable avalanche of sweating, swearing humanity. Then The Chimera pinned him after an abdominal stretch, and he had lost the first fall.

He lurched over to his corner and Jagganath was there to rub him dry and pour encouragement into his ear.

"Johnny, he's knocked himself out for that fall, he's lost seven pounds if he's lost an ounce and he's panting like a hound. Keep your head and you've got him this time. What've you figured about that Siberian death lock?"

"I wasn't thinking about the damned thing. I was fighting off fourteen men out there," said Johnny. "I see now why all the other fellows got it. They counted on observing him at close quarters to solve the business, and Jagganath, you can't observe him! He keeps coming in from different directions at the same time and—wow! Who said he wasn't a wrestler?"

"He's not a good one, Johnny, he's just dirty and strong. But he's worn himself out too much, old boy; you'll take him."

"Thank you, Mother," said Johnny. "I wish I had your confidence."

He went out for the second fall. The Chimera rushed in and picked him up for a Body slam; Johnny punched him hard in the belly and the champion toppled over backwards and Johnny might have pinned him, but he wanted to punish him a little; so he merely banged his head up and down on the mat a few times and let him up.

Then Johnny got him into a leg Nelson, feathered it a bit, slapped him on the forehead with the butt of his open palm until The Chimera roared, and Johnny bounced away, laughing. The Chimera started to rise and Johnny helped him with a knee lift in the face. The champ tried a drop kick, and Johnny moved away to let him fall to the canvas. The champion was extremely humiliated.

They worked each other over then, and Johnny knew that Jagganath had been right, and The Chimera had thrown too much into that first hurricane attack; for the champion was tiring.

The Chimera put a top wrist lock on Johnny and as it did not hurt particularly, Johnny stood there and thought about the Siberian death lock. He tried to think where a killing gimmick could be hidden on this great sweaty body, and rejected the navel and the mouth, which seemed to cover all the possibilities. He recalled Mike showing him the killray cylinder. It was so tiny that it could be hidden almost anywhere. Yet how to trigger it when the need came?

THEN HE pictured the death signal of the Chimera, and all at once in a flash of joyous wisdom, he knew....

He broke the wrist lock by a couple of hearty judo cuts to the back of The Chimera's neck. The champion rushed him. Johnny sidestepped, caught him on his hip, threw him over to the mat. The Chimera came up, Johnny pushed him against the ropes, leaped at him and caught him around the neck with both hands, at the same instant showing both his feet into the great brute's stomach. He threw himself backwards in a monkey flip and the champion soared over his head. Johnny whirled agilely, fell across his body, and pinned the champion for Paul's count

of three.

"Jagganath," he hissed, as the Hindu came up to the ropes with a towel, "I've solved it!"

"By God," said the other fervently, "I knew you would."

"He has a killray cell hidden on him. The Siberian death lock is unadulterated chicanery."

"What d'you mean? That eye signal business?"

"No, the hammer lock and the half bear hug. I suppose he chose it because it's different and looks innocuous."

"And the signal of doom, with the fingers by the eye?"

"Is the whole secret. Now let me think."

"But how—"

"Shut up, son! I've got to plan this carefully."

Jagganath shut up dutifully and rolled his black eyes up with a shrug.

Johnny said not another word until the gong sounded for the third fall. Then he went in and began trotting around The Chimera.

"Get offa that blankety-blank bicycle," growled the champion.

"Not till I tell you something, you loathsome wart. I've got you where many a good man has wanted you but couldn't get you. You aren't going to kill me, Chimera, or Swineski, or whatever your real name is. You're going to be beaten this time. You're through, you dirty disease, done for, *kapat*. And your whole organization is finished." The Chimera made a snatch for him; he moved out of range. "The parliament of rulers is through with its tyranny. All the Special Action Police and the censors and the soldiers of despotism, they've had it. Within a month we'll be voting again, picking our jobs and our ways of life, and—"

The Chimera leaped upon him and they fit together. For a minute it was a tussle, a melee in which they fought

not with science, but with the undisciplined ferocity of carnivores. The skirmish ended when The Chimera managed to put on a side headlock. His thumb was in Johnny's eye, so the ref broke it up.

They rose and The Chimera tried a flying scissors, which Johnny turned into an Indian lock on his leg. The champion put his hand up to his left eye, that slightly cocked left eye; and Johnny loosed the hold and scrambled up. The Chimera laughed.

"So you guessed it, smart boy?" he growled low, advancing on Johnny. "Now you know how you're gonna die, huh?"

"No, how you are going to die," snapped Johnny. Deliberately he left himself open, so that the champion could put the Siberian death lock on him: which The Chimera did, with a hideous laugh.

AT ONCE Johnny Bell knew why the others had gone down to death in this grip. The power of the champion's right arm was incredible. Johnny's left was powerless in the center of his own back, as that gnarled brown column of iron flesh held him against The Chimera's chest. Then the champion's left hand went to his eye.

Johnny waited as long as he dared; then, as the fingers spread out to touch the two corners of the eye, he lifted his own right hand like a snake striking, and pressed the man's lid down over that cocked green eye with his forefinger....

Stalemate. The champion's head jerked back and forth, and he snarled, "Whatcha doin', whatcha think you're doin', you scum?"

"Holding your eye shut, you ape. I suppose I can refer to it as your eye, even if it is glass—a glass eye with the pupil bored out and a killray cell replacing it, eh? With two sensitive

triggers at the corners, which you press simultaneously to shoot, a force-stream out of that pupil. Right?"

"You illegitimate son of a dog," said The Chimera, more or less.

"Neat job of surgery, too," said Johnny. "There must be a lot of delicate wiring back of that lid and the skin around the socket. I'll bet I could even name the ruler who fished it up out of his fertile swamp of a brain. Well? Why don't you press the triggers?"

"Think I wanna kill myself?" snarled the other, struggling.

The inexorable finger stayed on the lid. "You'd likely get me, too. What if the ray did pass through your lid first, and from there through the blood stream and into your heart? You'd be sacrificing yourself in a good cause, Chimera. What, no gallant gesture, no self-sacrifice?"

"You go to hell," said the champion, and releasing his hammer lock he stepped back. "How about this?" he bellowed, moving his hand up to the deadly orb. "How about I knock you off from here?"

He had forgotten the howling crowd even as Johnny Bell had. It was between them; no one else existed. He would shoot Johnny at a range of six feet, if need be, and trust to luck to keep his secret.

With a whoop Johnny launched himself at the burly wrestler, knocked him down, sat on his chest and—to the horror of the referee who could not fathom this sudden brutality—thrust his thumb down the flat nose and gouged out the left eye of The Chimera.

The stricken champion's shriek was drowned in a yell of pure delight from the maddened crowd. Jagganath at the ringside smote his forehead and gasped. "Of course! The crossed eye! Why didn't I think of that?"

THE GREEN glass eye, with its attached triggers and blood-smear platinum mechanism, rolled bumpily across the canvas.

Johnny Bell, in a frenzy of hatred and relief, picked up the champion's feet, revolved, lifted him off the mat to whirl him round and roared in a dizzying giant swing and flung him into a corner, where he followed him and pinned his evidently unconscious body for the count of three.

The Broadway Arena rocked to the titanic thunder of twelve thousand men and women screaming themselves hoarse.

Then Jagganath and Mike O'Rourke were in the ring, and over the amplifying system the Indian's voice burst like the triumphant roar of a brazen-throated bull: "Ladies and gentlemen—the new champion of the Federated Americas, Bellerophon the Great! Not sponsored by the almighty tyrants, but by the free people of this country! Do you want to know how The Chimera won his way until tonight? By a kill-ray hidden behind a glass eye—hidden by the surgeons of the parliament of rulers! An example—" the audience was suddenly death-still, and he lowered his voice—"an example of the way in which they rule, by trickery, by illegality, by force and lies and deceit!"

There were two score of Special Action Police stationed throughout the arena. At the downfall of The Chimera they had been astounded and uncertain as to what to do; now they knew. This was treason. They went for their pistols.

Not many managed to draw them. They were struck, swamped, inundated by a tide of underground warriors who had been waiting for this. Forty of them died where they stood, shot and clubbed and throttled by the raging men of Jagganath.

"Bolt those doors!" yelled the Indian. "Listen to me! Sit down, please! Everything is all right, everything is planned. This is a revolution, but it's us who'll do the fighting, not you! We're ready—we've been ready for years!—The parliament of rulers is finished!"

The frightened yapping sank to isolated shouting, and a man at the ring-side cried out, "They'll slaughter us when we leave, they'll shoot us down like rats!"

"No they won't. The people are rising all over the continents." Jagganath's cool voice cut through all opposition. "The signal goes out from here—went out when Johnny Bell pinned The Chimera. Trivideo screens are on us now in a million places. The perfidy of the rulers has been revealed to the world. Listen to me! Already the State of Uruguay has had a successful revolt!"

In the clamor following this, Johnny Bell panted in the Indian's ear, "I thought you said it was an abortive revolt."

"Abortive in the sense of being born prematurely, old man, not of being ineffectual. Uruguay is in our hands." He turned to the trivideo cameras at the side. "Are we still on, Joe?"

"Yeah," said the engineer laconically. "We must have taken the stations. Wait a minute. Yeah, we did. We'll stay on the air."

"Ladies and gentlemen!" bawled Jagganath, so loudly that Johnny stepped back a pace in surprise. "The eyes of our world are on us now; we're a focal point for every person who wants to live in a free land. Here's a man you'll want to hear."

INTO THE ring, helped by Mike O'Rourke and a dozen others, climbed the announcer Ted Brown. The audience sighed and fell silent,

and some of the women hid their faces. The hair had been burned off his head. One arm, broken at the shoulder, dangled uselessly as he limped to the microphone. Out of the mess of gore and half-caked scabs that was his face, his mouth opened.

"You all know me. I'm Ted Brown. You probably heard what I said at the champion's last fight. This is what they did to me—half of it. The rest you can't see. Be thankful."

There was no soap in his voice, no unctuousness. Only hatred.

"You've always known that there was an underground movement against the parliament of rulers. There always is, where there are tyrants. They've waited for this, the underground. They wanted to show you how the tyrants work, with all the filthy ways there are to command. You saw Johnny Bell—Bellerophon the Great, Jagganath calls him—scoop out that killray eye.

That's a symbol of the whole rotten gang.

"Now the underground is fighting for you. They're fighting in the streets and the houses and the palaces of the rulers. They've taken Uruguay State and they've all but taken Canada. They'll take it all. But I shouldn't say they, I should say we. The underground is us. They're the fighting men, but we're all in it with them, you and me and Brother Bill. We'll all want to back them up in the days to come. You can see the reasons, can't you? The good reasons?"

He paused, and the crowd cheered him, standing up.

"Jagganath's boys took me out of the torture dungeons of the rulers, just an hour ago. Those explosions you can hear are likely the dungeons going up in smoke. And by the way—" he lifted his good arm feebly "—I think you ought to know Jagganath's right name—Bill Moore."

Johnny Bell slapped the erstwhile Hindu on the back. "You might have told me, Those eyes—my God, they'd fool anyone."

"Bill Moore," grinned Jagganath. "Harvard, and Delhi University, where I failed in political science."

Johnny laughed. Then out of the corner of his eye he saw something moving across the ring. He whirled.

The Chimera, whom everyone had forgotten where he lay feigning unconsciousness, was scuttling like a great brown beetle toward the ropes. For an instant Johnny thought he merely wanted to escape. Then he saw the green glass eye on the canvas:

He bounded toward it. The Chimera's hand closed over it. "You and your Jagganath!" he grunted, as Johnny fell across his body "I'll show you. . . ."

THEY FOUGHT for possession of the deadly eye. Johnny, catching his wrist, bore it back over the ex-champion's shoulder. The Chimera knelt at him. His left hand clawed at Johnny's face.

"This is for Dickie Rivers," said Johnny melodramatically; and throwing every ounce of power into his arms, he wrenched down on The Chimera's wrist. The arm broke at the elbow with a sharp crack.

The Chimera screamed. Johnny hauled him up—the eye with its killray unit rolling harmlessly away—and twining his right leg around The Chimera's, threw on a half-nelson, holding the man in the cobra twist. The Chimera screamed. His body was being tugged in two directions and he was helpless. Johnny Bell, insane with loathing, drove the murderer's upper body back—back—back.

The Chimera's ribs tore out of his spine, the sight of his one eye blacked out into merciful night, his backbone

snapped and The Chimera was dead.

Johnny let the carcass fall. The people were roaring but he did not hear them. "I had to do it," he said, to nobody in particular.

"I know, old fellow, I know," said Bill Moore, alias Jagganath. "It was one of those things a man has to do, if he wants ever to sleep again. Speaking of sleep, you're due for some."

"But the fight, I've got to get out there and fight."

Mike O'Rourke said gently, "You've had your fight. We're taking you home to bed."

Johnny Bell looked at his friend and leader, Bill Moore. The turbaned head with its black piercing eyes nodded. "That's right, Johnny. In half an hour the Federated Americas will be the Free Americas. There's no doubt of it now. You've done your work and had your brawl. Now there's a few years' sleep to catch up on."

Suddenly Johnny Bell was very, very tired. His knees buckled and his tensed muscles went limp, and if Bill had not caught him he would have pitched to the mat.

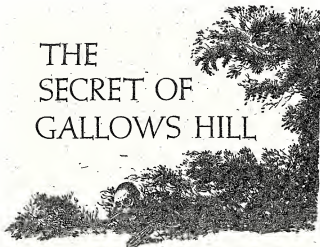
"Okay, okay," he said wearily, the noise of the crowd lapping over him like the waves of a blessed soothing ocean. "Okay, Jaggy, put me to bed. I guess I'm too weak to revolt."

They bathed him and put his clothes on and took him home through the jubilant throngs, and as they laid him in bed the guns of the harbor fortress and the bells of the city signaled the downfall of the last tyrant. But Johnny Bell never heard them at all, because he was fast asleep. His last conscious thought had not been that his country was free, or that the years of terrible necessary hatred were over; it had been that now he could go back to college, take that literary major, and put away his wrestling harness forever.



It was eerie. The wind howled through the trees, and yet not a branch moved

THE SECRET OF GALLOWS HILL



By Paul W. Fairman

Type had to be destroyed because of his crime against the state. But what could happen if the gallows failed to agree with the verdict?

OLD MAN Calloway squinted through a bloodshot eye and said, "The Marty mansion? Sure—I know where it is."

Neil Gorman smiled. "Well, that's fine. I—"

"Been in these parts nigh onto seventy years. Born here. I'll die here. Know every hill and hollow and tumbledown shack for fifty miles

about."

"It's the Marty mansion in particular I'm—"

"I can take you to a place up the hills where the Indians hid out from the French. The moccasin tracks is still there."

Gorman thought the sight of his wallet might help. He took it out. Calloway put his bloodshot eye on the

wallet and tested his quid for lost flavor. "You're wanting to see the Marty place?"

Neil Gorman sat down on the slanting stoop beside Calloway. Through the open door of Calloway's gray board shack there came an assortment of odors—none refreshing.

"Maybe I should tell you a little more about myself," Gorman said. "I have a hobby of looking into old places and old legends. I go, here and there—to back country taverns, small grocery stores—and get into conversation with native people. When I uncover something out of the ordinary, I follow it up."

"Been around here nigh onto seventy years," Calloway repeated stoutly.

"Fine," Gorman waited no longer. He took a ten-dollar bill from his wallet and handed it to Calloway. The old man accepted the bill without comment and stuffed it into the watch pocket on the bib of his overalls.

"Lots of history around this country," Calloway said. "Why, little Sybil Ludington went ripping down this very road in 1777 to get her pappy's regiment together. She rid all night and the boys lined up and went down the road to whip the spots off the British."

"I know," Gorman replied. "There's a state historical plaque down by the corner telling all about it. But that sort of thing isn't quite what I'm interested in."

"Been around here all my life," Calloway reminded him for the third time.

"Then you might be able to verify a story I heard the other day about a deserted village somewhere up in the hills."

"I might."

"As I got the story, it was during a very dry season many years ago. All the inhabitants were driven out one dark night by snakes."

"That so?"

"The cellars under the houses and the wells the people had dug were the only damp places for miles around. So one night thousands of snakes invaded the village. The people got out of bed and fought their way to safety, the men armed with flaming torches and the women carrying the babies."

Calloway was pondering this and Gorman's eyes grew dreamy. "Imagine that scene of high drama up in the hills! The population of a town trapped by—by pure horror. Fighting their way in darkness through piles of writhing bodies!"

Calloway quirked his bloodshot eye. "Who told you this yarn?"

"I heard it from a couple of old fellows in a tavern down the line."

"You bought them, boys a few drinks maybe?"

"I certainly did. All they wanted."

"Well—the natives, hereabouts don't like to be beholden to no one. They like to give value for what's received. Maybe some of those snakes came out of their whisky glasses."

GORMAN sighed. "I was afraid of that. The story was too good to be true. But about this Marty place. Are the stories I've heard about it true?"

"All depends on what they told you."

"They say the house is very old; that it dates back to revolutionary times. It stands in the heart of the wooded up-country on a knoll called Gallows Hill."

"Uh-huh. That's about right, I guess. They hung a Yankee spy up there. The British did, that is. Gave the hill its name."

"I've gone into the background pretty thoroughly. It seems the British were garrisoned in the house for a while and an officer was found strangled in his bed one morning."

Calloway shrugged. "Can't see as there's anything in that to get excited

about. So one of his men didn't like him. So he got his wind cut off."

"Nothing in that—no. But later—only five years ago, in fact—there was an Englishman over here trying to trace one of his ancestors in the graveyards hereabouts. One who fought the Americans during the Revolution and was buried over here."

Calloway shrugged again. "Lots of them redcoats got killed. I've heard tell they were a mite foolish. Stood in line with red coats on. Ducks in shooting gallery, sort of. Plumb idiotic."

Gorman was being patient with the oldster's digressions. He heard him out and went on. "The Englishman believed his ancestor had been the officer who had ordered the execution of the American spy and was later found strangled in a room of this house on Gallows Hill."

"It'd be kind of hard to be sure about a thing like that."

"He was quite sure. He went to the old house and spent the night there."

Calloway took the ten dollar bill from his pocket and began folding it into a pipe cleaner. "Recollect that fellow. Didn't know he was a Britisher though. Went up there myself with the State troopers. They're the law around here, you know. And this young fellow was lying on that old bed with some covers he brought along. He was stone dead. He'd been strangled."

"And there was another one," Gorman said grimly. "About a year ago."

"Recollect him, too. Same deal to a T. Dead on the same bed. Beats me why them fellows came up here just to stick their necks out. Plumb foolish."

"The murders were never solved."

"Don't recall, as they were. The troopers nosed around plenty, but you get up in them hills and—well, there ain't much to go on. There's a few characters up in them wilds that

might kill a man but how you going to find out? They ain't nowhere around when the troopers get there."

"Can you take me to Gallows Hill?"

Calloway may have been surprised or he may not have. His face was the kind that didn't show much. "Wby, sure. I can take you there. Quite a walk though. It's kind of off the beaten track." Calloway glanced down at Gorman's footwear. "I see you got good boots."

GORMAN was silent for a moment, then appeared to come to a decision. "I'll stop beating around the bush because I doubt if I'm fooling you a bit. I'm not tracing down legends in general. I'm after one legend in particular. You see, the name of the two men who died in that house was also Gorman. They were my brothers."

Calloway looked up quickly. "You be a Britisher too, then?"

In spite of himself, Gorman said, "Yes. I be a Britisher. On my mother's side. The Gorman is Irish, but all our tradition is English. Our line dates far back."

Calloway remained silent and Gorman felt called upon to explain further. "My elder brother, Samuel—the one who died first—was very well off. He could afford to cater to his whims. And it was entirely a whim that brought him over here in search of the Revolutionary ancestor's grave. His trip, of course, ended in tragedy."

Calloway said, "Then your other brother got up on his ear and came over to have a look-see."

"That's about it. One of us would have come sooner but it was a matter of money. We didn't have much. Sam's went to his wife. Finally we got enough together so that one of us could come. That was Reggie. You saw him dead."

"I saw him, all right."

Gorman sighed. "So now I'm here and it's going to end up differently. I'm not as superstitious as I may have led you to believe. My brothers were murdered and your bobbies aren't having any luck in finding the killers. I'm going to follow this thing through to the end."

"Always did hear the British were stubborn cusses. Got any more brothers waiting to take ship in case anything happens to you?"

"No. I'm the last."

Calloway had taken a rank-smelling pipe from his pocket and was cleaning it using the tightly folded ten-dollar bill as a probe. Now the filled the pipe, lit it, unfolded the bill and stuffed it back into his watch pocket. He squinted at the sun.

"Well, if you're set on going up there, we might as well get started. How long you planning to stay?"

"I don't know. Until I develop some sort of a lead."

"That might be quite a spell. You got provisions?"

Gorman walked to his car and removed therefrom two items: a knapsack, and a .45 automatic. "This will do for the time being and if I'm not back in, say, three days, perhaps you'll bring me some food. I'll pay you, of course."

"Can't say as that's unreasonable. Wouldn't think of letting a man starve to death in the hills."

"What about my car? Can I leave it here?"

"Sure. Nobody'll bother it. Me—I can't drive anyhow."

Calloway picked up a squirrel rifle that was leaning against the wall of the shack and put it under his arm. "Let's go," he said. "We got a pretty fair road for a ways. Then it gets kind of growed over."

They walked until Gorman was exhausted from trying to match Calloway's long, easy strides. They

stopped to rest three times, Gorman dropping gratefully to the ground; Calloway merely leaning on his rifle to wait with stoic patience.

The country grew rougher and more wild. The road turned into an overgrown pathway. Then that, too, vanished and there were only thick grass, rocks, and everlasting trees.

Finally, after two hours, Calloway pointed up the slope. "There she is," he said.

GORMAN could see part of the old house, up on the center of the round knoll. It was completely surrounded by trees. Two black windows stared out sightlessly, giving pregnant clue to the empty, dead desolation within.

"Mighty old house," Calloway said, "but built—really built. They put them up in those days."

"But why out here?" Gorman wanted to know. "A hundred miles from nowhere—"

"Maybe now, but not then. The roads are all growed over, but they can be found. It's just that the new roads took a different turn and left places like this one kind of stranded."

Gorman had dropped, from sheer exhaustion, to a seat on a gray boulder. Calloway stood leaning on his rifle.

"This was quite a place back then," Calloway said. "My old granddaddy lived to be a hundred and one—died when I was a lad—and many's the time he told me. It was the owner of this farm that the British hung as a spy right from his own tree—the one there at the end of the house."

Calloway moodily surveyed the wild tangle of brush and high grass. The trees had long been untended. "Kind of reminds you of a man that needs a haircut, that knoll. Wasn't like that in Jim Sype's day. Loved the land, he did, and the trees and grass.

And it's said they grew for him like nobody else. As if they loved him too, or so my granddaddy said."

The old man whacked the ash from his pipe—roughly, as though ashamed of his sentiment. He looked toward the forest rim behind which the sun had descended. "We better be getting along up the knoll. I want to start back before dark."

"Would you like to stay here with me?" Gorman asked suddenly.

Calloway thought it over. "No, don't guess I would. Tracking down legions is a little out of my line, son. Reckon you're on your own with this one."

They climbed the knoll in silence except for the whispering of the trees and the cry of a lonesome loon from the marshes nearby.

"There's the bed your brothers died on," Calloway said a few minutes later.

Gorman brushed a cobweb off the cracked and peeled headboard. "Strange it hasn't been carted away. There's no other furniture in the place."

"It's been stolen and broken up over the years. Guess nobody wanted that bed though. Most folks ain't a mind to get cozy with ghosts."

Gorman left his pack in the room which had evidently been the kitchen after which he shook hands with Calloway.

"I'll drop back in about three days if you don't turn up," Calloway said. "Reckon you can find your way back if you want to come sooner?"

"I think so."

"Just follow the line where we tropped the grass down and travel by the sun. So long, youngster."

And Gorman felt a great deal like a youngster a few minutes later, after Calloway had disappeared into the woods. There was a feeling of loneliness such as he had never before experienced.

He shrugged it off swiftly, however, and started a blaze in the huge fireplace. He heated a can of beans, ate them, and realized for the first time that the light from the fireplace was all he had. He'd eaten the beans straight from the can. Now he put a little more wood on the fire, went outside, and hurled the can as far as he could.

"Disb's done with a flick of the wrist," he chuckled.

But the chuckle was entirely synthetic. His true mood was as heavy and somber as that of Gallows Hill. It was pitch dark now, and he sat on the back steps, trying to recreate in his mind that long-gone, grim day in the history of this silent house.

DEEP IN his imagination, the night was gone; the house was new and bright with paint. The grass on the knoll was smooth as velvet.

A clatter of arms and horses from around the bend of a road he had not seen before.

And the British were there, a crack column, smart and trim in their white pants and red coats.

The column surrounded the house, trampling the hedges and cutting the sod with the sharp hooves of their horses. Their arms were at ready.

A lieutenant, greatly resembling Gorman himself, rode up to the stoop. He shouted a summons but Gorman could not hear the words. The door opened behind Gorman and a man came out—a yellow-haired Yankee in shirt, boots and britches. There was some conversation between the Lieutenant and the Yankee who—Gorman knew—was named Sype.

Then four soldiers dismounted and took Sype into custody. He did not struggle. His contemptuous eyes remained upon the mounted lieutenant. The British officer spoke and Gorman knew this was the death sentence though he could not hear the words.

Suddenly the figures vanished and Gorman sat musing for a moment. "I wonder which tree they used."

He spoke the words aloud and they brought him back through the years and he saw that the tableau was over because the moon had come up to wash away the dark slate upon which he'd painted his shadowed reveries.

It was a full, bright moon. Bright enough to read by, so Gorman went into the kitchen and got from his knapsack a small diary and returned to the steps to read. The passages that caught his eye were in the scrawling hand of his elder brother—the first to come to Gallows Hill.

It is a strange, wonderful, haunting place and I am sure our flesh and blood lies buried here. Somewhere.

So far I have discovered no graves of any kind and I got no help from the natives. But when Lieutenant Richard Castle died here that night so long ago, the army had no facilities for carrying the body away. He was interred somewhere in these hills. I only hope that when I find the grave, the words on the marker will still be legible.

There was more, but Gorman thumbed on through the book to where his second brother had taken up the running narrative a few years later. The neat, precise handwriting of an entirely different personality.

A disgusting place. A lazy and uncooperative population. The natives are more interested in spinning tall tales than helping solve a murder. Idiotic yarns about snakes trapping whole villages in the night and taking over their dwelling places. That particular tale cost me several snorts

of whisky poured into two old characters who were very sad when I left the tavern.

A later entry.

The bed is still there. I slept on it last night and nothing happened. Nothing except I almost froze to death. It was very chilly without a fire in the room.

Once during the night, I fancied I heard someone persistently tapping on my closed door. I took my gun and opened the door but no one was there. Nothing but my own nerves.

And the final entry in the book.

Another night of almost freezing to death. I'm very much afraid I'm off, on the wrong track. No one has tried to kill me. No ghosts have pecked at me around any corners.

I shall stay one more night. It seems much warmer today, so instead of freezing in that room, I'll probably be gasping for air.

Gorman closed the book. His brother had stayed that night: and the next and the next. When they found him on the bed in that room he had been dead for several days.

Strangled.

GORMAN was exceedingly weary. Too tired to anticipate ghosts or murderers or anything else. But as he climbed the stairs—using shafts of white moonlight coming in through blank and empty windows—he was thoroughly resolved to remain awake and alert. The feel of the .45 in his hand was comforting.

It was chilly. As he stretched out on the bed, he wished he'd brought along a blanket.

He went to sleep almost instantly.

But there was a dream—or rather, a mild nightmare. It seemed to him that he lay on the bed, wide awake, with the moon gone down, to hear a persistent tapping at the window beside which he lay.

And a muted, somber background of words—like a death-march in his imprisoned mind:

*And the silken sad uncertain
rustling of each purple curtain
filled me with fantastic terrors
never felt before—*

A poem, written long before, by a tormented man—a child who walked hand in hand with dark sorrow and terror of the soul. Poe—and his Raven.

The persistent tapping on the window of a melancholy and deserted house.

*"Surely," said I, "surely that
is something at my window lat-
tice;*

*Let me see then what where-
at is, and this mystery explore—*

*'T is the wind and nothing
more."*

But there was no wind on Gallows Hill. Only the stillness and utter desolation of men long-dead—places dusty and long-forgotten.

Gorman awoke tired, with no sense of having slept and rested. He was heavy-eyed, but a hot sun had swept away the uncertainties of night and the knoll was as before—brooding-quiet in the shimmering heat, the windows of the ancient house staring sightless across the tree tops.

Gorman emptied a can of beans and a can of peaches, then found a shaded and moss-covered spring at the foot of the hill. He tramped the woods around and about the knoll for several hours.

And it seemed he became one with

the macabre spirit of Gallows Hill. Even under the bright and beating sun, the spell thrived and deepened. It was as though a hand had reached far out across the sea to bring him to this place. As though not really through a sense of outraged justice had he come, but rather as a puppet at the end of a string, drawn closer and ever closer until now he was here and some mystic circle could be completed which could not have been completed otherwise.

Night came—a heavy, oppressively hot night. Even with the trees to fend the beating sun from the land, the heat crept in and crawled along the grass to saturate the knoll and the empty house.

As the sun went down, Gorman had a strange, unhidden thought:

*The circle is almost complete. This
will be the final tightening. Some
strange doom haunts this place and
I have been marked. I should leave—
yet I cannot. I must stay. I must
stay.*

HE WENT to bed with the full moon again standing watch over the house on Gallows Hill. But after a short time found the room utterly stifling. He raised the window and was surprised at how easily it gave. Then he lay back and sought sleep while the tree outside the window whispered in the hot breeze.

But on this night he could not sleep. Rather, a langorous, half-dreaming lethargy enveloped his mind as he lay there. And the thought:

*Some great strength brought me
here. Now some great weakness holds
me to this bed.*

The whispering of the tree grew louder and took on the unintelligible rhythm of a great many voices calling from far away—yet in whispers—always maddening whispers.

As of exultant entities.

The branch came softly through the

window; gently as though not wishing to disturb. It lay across Gorman's breast. It had a strength to press downward—to hold.

Gorman looked dreamily at the branch. He could not resist but there were words from his memory. Calloway's casual words:

"Loved the land, he did, and the trees and the grass—it's said they grew for him like nobody else—as if they loved him too, or so my granddaddy said."

Starkly in Gorman's mind: *This is the tree they used. Is this the branch they hung him from?*

Whatever spell there had been was now broken. Gorman screamed. But the branch had him pinned to the bed. And outside the tree was laughing—chuckling—and from all about the

knoll the other trees were getting the news and rejoicing—sending whispered orders on the breeze to the gallows tree now exacting added vengeance for a spy named Sype who had been hanged by the neck until dead.

Gorman continued to scream and struggle but a second branch had now come in the window to aid the first—a second arm of vengeance. But thin and supple—able to encircle the throat of a man—to draw tight like a hempen noose.

Gorman died with the smell of fresh green leaves in his nostrils—with the laughter of the trees in his ears.

Then—after the time of vengeance—all was brooding and quiet on Gallows Hill.

THE END

THE WRATH OF RUST

By Willon Avery MacDonald

THE STEEL AGE, as we like to think of it, is troubled by one insidious enemy, whom we have not yet succeeded in conquering. His name is "rust" and, in his slow, simple way, he costs Man more in terms of material goods than it is possible to tabulate. We live in a civilization founded upon ferrous metals, iron and steel; yet more ravenously than termites go into wood, rust assaults steel and iron.

True enough, rust-proof alloys and metals are available. But these are expensive and comparatively scarce and in no possible way could the hundreds of millions of tons of steel be protected with them. As a result the paint and plastic industries go all out in providing their temporary protections which do not endure. Also, as a result, a wide-range program has begun to fight this enemy—it will mean eventually a tremendous boost to our economy.

All metals oxidize—the technical name for rusting; why then are steel and iron so critical? The answer is that while most metals do, rust, the thin oxide surface that coats them is tough and durable and serves to protect the metal beneath it.

Copper roofs, for example, even though corroded almost beyond recognition, endure for hundreds of years. Steel or iron under the same circumstances would crumple into red dust. Why?

Iron rust is porous and the air continues to penetrate it, destroying it quite rapidly. If some way could be found to make this rust or oxide film dense and stable, the problem would be solved: it now appears that a solution will soon be available. Experiments with moderately high temperatures in oxygen-free, water-vapor-filled chambers, indicate that a magnetic oxide of iron coating can be obtained which is highly resistant to further corrosion. If this program succeeds on a wide scale, prices for ferrous items will come down. In view of iron and steel corrosion, so rapid and so easy, it is a miracle that we can construct structures to last as long as they do—invariably you'll notice those things built for the future are coated and buried in cementive protection. Soon that won't be necessary—and steel structures will look just like that—not disguised pagodas to confuse the archeologists of the future!



XENON

FOR THE FUTURE

By June Lurie

THE STORY of anesthetics has been one of continual change ever since the first crude efforts were made at using ether and chloroform. Gaseous anesthetics, injections of opiates—all these methods leave much to be desired because of their after-effects usually including illness and nausea which may not merely interfere with the patient's recovery, but may threaten his life.

In the search, practically every known gas has been tried except the so-called "noble gases" like argon, krypton, etc. Because these gases fail to react with anything less than high temperatures (which gives them their name "noble") it would be thought that they'd certainly

be useless as anesthetics.

In spite of this, scientists have tried one of the noble gases, "xenon", which occurs in air in minute proportions. The results have been laudatory. The anesthetic has the unique property of leaving no after-effects at all. Rather extensive experiments have been tried with it—all satisfactory. As a consequence, we are likely to see this gas as the general anesthetic of the future. It is obtained from the fractional distillation of liquid air, and, though it exists in small amounts, enough can be obtained for its economical use in this sort of medical work. It can be regarded as a by-product of obtaining liquid oxygen for industry.

RECENT MONTHS have seen numerous misleading reports that DDT is being beaten by the insect world, that the bugs have adapted themselves to this chemical agent and have acquired an immunity against it. None of these things is true. In isolated instances, with certain strains of insects, DDT has failed to produce the promised result, but it still remains the most potent single weapon in Man's unrelenting war against the powerful insect world. Ask anybody in the tropics!

DDT is so valuable that at present there is a world shortage which threatens to nullify the great gains it has given people living in areas with primitive sanitary facilities or in infested tropical areas. Consequently manufacturers are girding up to produce this precious chemical in greater quantities.

Malaria, typhus and plague are three merciless killers which have terrorized the tropical world for countless centuries and which have made of it a hell not only for colonial administrators but for natives as well. In fact one of the major reasons, economically, that tropical countries are less "industrious, industrialized and active than their northern neighbors, is that they have been ridden with strength-sapping diseases such as these. The only weapon that proved staggering to the insect world was DDT.

Few people who live in temperate climates can realize what a dreadful power the disease-ridden insect carriers wield against the inhabitants of tropic and semi-tropic lands. It has even been suggested that, if the insect world were ever to get a real foothold against Man, it would start in the tropics, and is prevented from do-



ing so only by the combative efforts of the people who live there. They in turn had fought bravely but inadequately until the advent of DDT, which so far has proved an irresistible club against which the chitinous hordes cannot stand.

Science fiction has used the theme of the conquering insect for a long time. Few realize just how possible this so-called "remote" idea is. It is very real—a definite menace which hasn't taken form so far, not because of Man's brilliance but because of the lack of organization of the insects. Some biologists believe that this is only a matter of time; that ultimately the insect world will inherit the Earth. And that is no fantasy! The common cockroach has existed on the planet for a hundred million years unchanged by the cycles of evolution—Man has endured less than a million years—and he has changed greatly. Since he's been setting himself up for his own elimination with hydrogen bombs and atomic warfare, perhaps the concept of the cockroach inheriting the Earth may not be at all far-fetched!

WHEN GREED STEPS IN...

By F. G. Royer



The silver staff must have been very sacred. Each native carried only one lump, nursing it gently



Mactavish and Kennedy were out for all they could get. But Mactavish wanted the least of the most

RAIN HAMMERED on the ship's hull and on the oilskins of the girl and man coming across the steaming ground. Out there up near the galaxy's edge some of the planets seem to have tough weather, by Earth standards, and Cephénid II, wobbling its hundred-day year round a small, young sun, was living up to

rumor. Captain Kennedy scowled as he admitted the two newcomers into the entrance lock.

"Didn't know there was another Earthman in this system," he said.

He swore. I knew it was the hope that he'd have the little planet all to himself for at least a few days that had brought him at top speed from

Earth, and I looked at the pair shaking their waterproofs. The girl was maybe twenty-five; small, neat and having a purposeful look. The man had to be her father; there were the same blue eyes, mildly amused, the same kind, keen face, though older and wrinkled. A look of recognition came into the blue eyes.

"Kennedy, by the horned saint!" the man said. "What chance brings ye here?"

"The same as you, Mactavish!" Kennedy snapped, and I saw he was more uneasy than he wanted to show. "Rumors of a rake-off for them who are quick!"

I knew Kennedy had expected to be first on the little Cepheid. A cruiser had put down there for repairs and a crewman had taken back a piece of curious stuff he'd found. It had made him rich and he had talked. Kennedy was one of a pack of wolves anxious to cash in, had supposed himself to be the first until we met Mactavish.

Mactavish stroked his long nose and grinned. "By Halley, rumors travel! Is there no honor among thieves, mon?"

He raised his eyes expressively towards where heaven might be and Kennedy snorted.

"You're as much a thief as any of us! I warrant you nearly burned your old tramp up getting here first—"

Mactavish lifted a hand. "No swearing, Cap'n, we've ladies present. Meet my gal Jill." She smiled, nodding. "No bad feelings over the past," Mactavish continued. "No quarreling. By the comet, but there's enough space in the cosmos for two millionaires! We'll split."

Kennedy's eyes were angry; he was a head taller than the older man and lacked the latter's kindly looks. I had only shipped with Kennedy because Planetary Records expects an early report on any new planet and I hadn't

reached that level where they'd give me a ship of my own.

"Split nothing!" Kennedy said. "I haven't forgotten what happened on Pluto! No, Jock Mactavish; I've got you where I want you this time, and you know it. I can leave that tub of yours six months behind."

JOCK MACTAVISH looked hurt. "You wouldn't do that, Mr. Kennedy. You wouldn't spoil a poor old trader's chance, or spoil the market for him? A single load of this stuff will fill Earth's needs for generations. Me mother wouldna believe you'd be that unkind..."

"I would—and will!"

Kennedy stamped off back to the control room to see to the delayed landing check-up.

With a heavy sigh, Mactavish led his daughter away and they vanished in the teeming rain. I got a waterproof and went out. The rain was hot and heavy and thunder cannonaded in the distance, blue flickers sometimes showing through the murk. The Mactavishes had a rough shelter outside their ship, which was a crate that would not knock up a quarter the speed of Kennedy's ship. Jill was standing under the shelter, her red hair freed from the waterproof's hood. I hoped she didn't think me one of Kennedy's special chums. Kennedy was hard—and mean.

"Is it always this wet?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Only these last few days."

"Anything interesting around? You've been here some days, I see."

"A week."

The tone was hostile. "Look," I said, "I'm not tied up with Kennedy; I'm merely collecting a rough first report for Planetary Records. They tag exploratory journeys and pushed me on to him. I've got two stars up. If I get another, then they give me command of my own ship, and more

pay."

She smiled, and that was a reward. "I've heard of you boys. Dad had been hoping to retire after this trip. Can't you help negotiate an agreement? Dad was here first; it's mere rotten luck his ship's slow."

"I'll try." I thought that extra pay maybe would be enough to marry on.

"And tell Kennedy the stuff is sacred," she shouted after me as I set off back through the rain. "Sacred. Nobody can touch it except the natives."

THAT SHOOK me for a moment and it shook Kennedy too. But I saw he was determined to forestall Mactavish, feather his own nest, then overload the Earth market.

"If Mactavish can get it loaded, so can I!" he growled.

Early next morning he was out. Temporarily fine weather brought out the natives to see the new ship. The tallest was up to my shoulder. All wore vari-colored one-piece garments like shirts reaching to their ankles. By signs I learned that the stuff we sought was half a mile away over a rocky hill, and I set off that way.

Kennedy soon caught me. "One of these days he'll call himself Tavish to save ink," he stated, jerking a thumb towards Jock's ship. "The stuff is in lumps and he's giving the natives one packet of tobacco for every ten lumps they carry into his ship! I can't calculate how many billion per cent profit that is!"

We went over the hill. Ahead, under a misty sun, was a vast pile of silvery-looking material. I gasped. It seemed to reach almost to the clouds. The little natives watched us approach. The stuff was in long, crystalline granules such as a man might encircle with finger and thumb, and I made a mental note to find out why it was

valuable. Kennedy bent to pick up a sample.

"Better not touch!" Mactavish's voice murmured.

He had followed us. Kennedy straightened. "I forgot! Funny customs in some places! But I'll show you yet!"

He emptied his pockets and made a pile of tobacco on the ground. I saw he wasn't one to lose time and the natives drew closer, eyes eagerly on the packets.

"Much, much tobacco in ship, savvy?" Kennedy pointed. "I give you one packet for every five lumps of this stuff you carry into my ship. Savvy?"

I left him gesticulating and counting on his fingers and went on a little way by myself. When I got back, a stream of natives had already begun to carry the stuff down to Kennedy's ship and Kennedy was grinning triumphantly. He spat on the earth.

"They chew the tobacco, though tenth-rate barter brand!" he said. "The flavor tickles their palate. Wait till Jock sees!"

ALL DAY the stream of natives up and down the hill continued. When I saw Kennedy again he was pleased with the progress made in loading his ship, yet irritated.

"Never saw such weaklings on any planet in my life!" he said. "It wastes time!"

I saw what he meant. Each native carried only one lump of the silvery stuff, and nursed it gently between both hands.

"Perhaps they're that gentle because it's sacred," I said.

I drifted over to Mactavish's shelter and found Jock smoking placidly under the lee of his ship. His hat was off and his sandy hair stood out.

"I hear ye're not on that Kennedy man's side, laddie," he greeted me.

"No. I'd like to get a fair deal made."

"Any deal with Kennedy would be fair as five aces." He puffed, eyeing me critically. Then his gaze strayed to the busy natives. "He's out-bid me on the bacca. But come inside—looks like another storm anyway."

We went into the ship and to his cabin. He poured out drinks, drowning mine in water.

"To Kennedy's load!" he said.

We drank and I put the glass down. Mactavish grinned at my expression.

"I'm not the mon to hold his past against him or wish him bad luck!" he said. "Me mother wouldna like that. I even slipped word to the natives he might want help loading up his ship. I taught their chief a few words, too."

HIS FACE was like a wooden gar-goyle. There was a lump of the silvery stuff on his desk and I reached for it. He put a gnarled old hand on my arm.

"Don't touch it, laddie. Never know if them natives are watching."

I played with my glass, curious. "What is it? What's its value?"

Jock puffed and leaned back in his chair. "I don't know what it is. Leave that to the scientific lads. But this crewman begins scratching glass with his bit and tells a pal. In short, it's the hardest thing in the cosmos. It'll scratch a diamond, they say, yet is easily worked as iron when hot. For drills and similar cutting machinery it'll fetch a fortune. It can be fused on to any ordinary metal. Even a thousandth of an inch layer is almost everlasting. I've heard the scientific lads have been successful in electro-plating tools and bearings with it, too."

I eyed the silvery piece with new respect and decided Mactavish was

not such a simpleton as he sometimes tried to appear.

"Have you no more tobacco?" I asked.

He understood. "Plenty. Also as much of this stuff as I plan to take."

"Then why not blast off with it?"

"Because Kennedy could still get to Earth months before me, laddie. By Galileo, I could have made a fortune!" He sighed and helped himself to a second drink. "By the time Kennedy has sold his, I'll be lucky if mine will cover expenses."

Jill came in. We talked of other things and at last I went off to write my preliminary report. I found Kennedy's stock of tobacco gone, but the natives still carrying for the promise of more to come. Jill and Jock had agreed that the origin of the stuff was curious but apparently shrouded in the dim past. The pile had been there as long as any native could remember—had always been there, the wise ones of the tribe said. It wasn't the most peculiar thing I'd seen on strange planets by a long way, and I didn't particularly care where it had come from.

THE NEXT day Mactavish wandered across and Kennedy invited him triumphantly. "I'd like you to see my cargo, Jock."

He was being nasty, but we went through the ship. Every space, including the main holds, was filled with neatly stacked silvery lumps.

Mactavish's brows slowly went up and up. At last he sighed. "By-the-saint, ye've enough here to buy a planetary system, with careful selling!"

Kennedy patted the high piles. "Remember Pluto?" he asked.

Mactavish seemed to be taking his defeat well. "Me mother always told me never to hold malice," was all he said.

That night it rained so violently that the first storm seemed a spring shower. I awoke to find Mactavish and Kennedy holding parley outside with a native.

"Wrong to move sacred silver," the native was saying. "Cause much bad weather."

I was amazed at the ease with which he had picked up these few phrases, but remembered Jock's teaching.

"No want more," Mactavish said.

"No more," Kennedy agreed.

The native bowed, obviously satisfied. "Good. Cause much bad weather. Sacred spirit angry." He left, dignified and erect.

"So what?" Kennedy said when he had gone. "I've got all of the stuff I want. I'm ready to blast off."

"And I," said Mactavish.

Kennedy scoffed at him and I went with Mactavish back to his old tramp. Somehow, I'd had enough of Kennedy, who was ruining Jock's one real chance of ending up a rich man, and I knew no real spaceman would refuse a lift to anyone from Planetary Records, who do so much to clear up original doubt on a score of vital points.

"Look," I said. "Why not hurry?"

Mactavish shook his head. "No use, laddie. Kennedy could leave us months behind. His ship is fast."

HE MADE leisurely preparations, economically taking down the old hut and storing it in the hold. Then he took out his remaining stock of tobacco and distributed it among the natives.

"Never let other men touch sacred silver," he said as he handed the packets out. "Cause much rain. Cause bad luck."

They all nodded vigorously. Mactavish closed the airlock and I went with him and Jill into the control room. He switched on the inter-ship

radio and called Kennedy. He had one lump of the silvery stuff near the control panel and he was stroking it tenderly. Sooh Kennedy's voice came back.

"Mactavish here," Jock said. "I'm still game for a fair split, because there's enough for both, and because me mother said never to hear malice—"

"You're nuts!" Kennedy sounded angry.

"Nay, mon, just kind-hearted. Don't you want to play the game my way?"

Kennedy's reply was abusive. Mactavish shrugged. "Me gal is listening," he said, and took off. All the time his expression puzzled me. He seemed in no hurry to get the ship right away and the intercom was still on.

"I'll leave you months behind!" Kennedy's voice came, a note of satisfaction in it.

Mactavish stroked the silver lump. "The natives will never help unload your ship, Cap'n," he said. "Bring much bad luck to move sacred silver lumps, eh! Besides, you got no more bacca."

"What makes you think I want unloading!" snapped Kennedy impatiently.

"Me common sense, mon. Ever handled one of them lumps?"

"N-no. Wanted to avoid arousing the natives' feelings." Kennedy's voice held a new note of panic.

"And quite right too," Mactavish said.

He motioned and I saw he wanted me to pick up the lump by his panel. I took it with one hand; gasped, and took it with two. I could just lift it an inch.

"Collapsed atomic structure," Mactavish said. "Them wee natives aren't weaklings. Ever see under their nightshirts? All muscles and brawn! I

hate to think how many thousands of tons overload Kennedy's got on board and no means of shifting it."

The reproducer began to stutter and roar with a voice now filled with angry panic; Mactavish switched it off.

"Tut, tut, and with my gal listening, too," he said softly. "Hope he doesn't blow his tubes out trying to take off with that lot. Never wished any mon bad luck...."

THE END

One De-Gaussing Girdle,



McGOVERN glanced at the control panel of the spaceship. Controls were on automatic and there was no reason for him to worry, yet out of long habit his eyes sought out the meteor-detector. Psychically he sensed it was about to go—and it did. The bell rang, the red light flashed, and there was a momentary surge of acceleration that threw him against the bulkhead. He grinned with relief—these autos were terrific, he thought, and in his mind's eye he could see the little pulse that the sensor had sent back, setting into motion the automatic devices that deviated the ship's course. Somewhere out there a huge chunk of rock and metal flashed by far out of harm's way....

That meteoric detector isn't fancy or imagination by any means. The facts and know-how are already here. During the last war ships were equipped with a powerful magnetic field called a "de-Gaussing girdle" which prevented magnetic mines from being drawn to them. Closely related to this—although not seemingly so—is the magnetometer, a sensitive device for checking disturbances in the Earth's magnetic field and much used for prospecting and for locating oil. The magnetometer has other uses, such as detecting submarines, but above all it is a perfect example of how sensitive instruments may be made, and of their potential uses when Man gets a foothold in outer space.

We can imagine the space ship of the future surrounded by a very strong magnetic field. In free space this field will reach out hundreds—perhaps thousands—of miles. A magnetometer within the vessel can scan the surrounding magnetic field and immediately note the exact location of any disturbing influence, such as a meteor—scanning the field in a way similar to radar, and as rapidly. Thus automatic apparatus can throw the ship off course the minute amount necessary to evade the special obstacle.



IT IS sometimes very difficult to convince the disinterested or casual observer of the value of interplanetary travel. Bumping your gums at a mile a minute, you enthusiastically describe the wonders of rocket flight, the first landing on the Moon, the eventual conquering of the planets, and your listener looks at you fishily and says, "But what for? What's the use?" Thinking you've got him, quick as a flash you come back with, "Who knows what valuable minerals and ores may exist there, plus the invaluable scientific investigations that may be conducted!" You carry on in that vein for an hour and your listener remains unimpressed—"So what?" he says. Recently science-fiction fans have found a sure-fire reply to the skeptic who thinks interplanetary travel is pointless. They make reference to a common denominator of interest that appeals to even the most skeptical—his health! When you mention the medical aspects of interplanetary flight your listener is hooked.

Fortunately there is a very serious and valuable aspect of Lunar travel which, until fairly recently, had been quite neglected. The gravitational force of the Moon is one-sixth that of the Earth! That little fact can mean a lot. In particular, consider sufferers from heart diseases, whose pumps are forced to fight against the ruggedness of Tellurian gravity. If you can reduce that force, think how much easier it is for the heart to work. Consequently, it is perfectly possible to think of the Moon as eventually becoming a huge health resort, covered with domed cities designed to house certain ills from Earth. This is by no means fantasy, assuming that the stresses and strain of rocket flight are finally eliminated by technology—as we have every reason to believe they will be. Luna, the traditional symbol of romance, of "moon" and "moon" and "June", is even closer to the heart than those words would have us believe!

USED MANY times in science fiction and anticipating the fact by decades, was the famed conception of the "spying robot." As sci-fi authors usually visualized it, it was a self-powered miniature sphere containing propelling devices, minute transmitters and photo-electric eyes, plus a variety of other gadgetry. This mechanism could easily sneak into an enemy encampment and discover and relay all necessary information.

And, as usual, science finally catches up with science fiction. Some time ago an electronic spying device was reported upon. This apparatus was dropped by parachute and it was designed to start operating by a timing switch. It would radio back information from behind enemy lines, information on atmospheric conditions, temperature, etc.

Since its inception it has been greatly improved, and already plans are being made to equip it with television "eyes" sensitive even to the infrared. Naturally it can be easily destroyed when once found, but in the interim it may relay very important information. As a variant, it may be equipped with explosives and, by using a proximity fuse device, it may be triggered to explode at the approach of an enemy.

Spies of this sort can also be arranged to act as variations of the familiar "booby-trap" idea. Equipped with pre-set radio fuses, the "spies" can be dropped at ran-



dom and then exploded by a suitable radio pulse—with devastating effect. Primarily, though, they will best serve as information relays. To artillerymen, bombardiers and the general staff, information on weather conditions behind an enemy's position is of vital importance. The electronic spy can deliver this either over a long period or immediately before an attack. What insidious variations may be made on the electronic snooper we can only guess, but whatever they are, it won't be pleasant to be on the receiving end!



By Rita Glanzman

OF ALL the wonderful natural phenomena in the whole Solar System, nothing is more awe-inspiring or more breathtaking than a view, even through a telescope, of the impressive rings of Saturn. Imagine what the first spacemen will feel when they get a close-up of that tremendous vision on their way to visit Saturnian satellites!

A great deal has been learned about the rings of Saturn, and they are no longer the mystery they once were. Early astronomers could give no plausible reasons for the existence of the rings—especially, since no other planet possesses such an arrangement, their uniqueness. Gradually, as telescopes improved, more was learned about the rings and slowly the logical explanation evolved. First, the rings are not solid, but consist of chunks of matter, vast amounts of it, like asteroids in the asteroid belt. This porousness is evident from a study of the shadow of the rings on the planet's surface, a diffuse, loosely defined shadow such as would be made by rings

consisting of particles and chunks. Previously the rings had been thought solid. Also, the rings were divided into definite bands with different rotational speeds, again determined by consideration of the shadow. No 'scope is powerful enough to show the components of the rings.

Spectroscopic study of the rings furnished further evidence of their nature and finally the explanatory theory evolved. The rings were once a satellite—but a satellite which, through gravitational forces, came too near the mother planet and was torn apart by those same forces! A satellite venturing too near the planet becomes unstable even if it is of solid steel, and the result is that it is broken up and reduced to shards. Thus were formed the Saturnian rings. The fact that several rings were formed instead of one is due to the gravitational interference of the other satellites of Saturn, which influenced the broken moon and further divided it into its now stable arrangement of three major rings of billions of little chunks and particles.



The fondness fed from the Fredian's face under the force of final disintegration

SATELLITE OF DESTRUCTION

By Burt B. Lister

**Absolute peace — or total annihilation.
The Fradians made no compromises. But
how can you be firm in a changing world?**



THE UNIFORM, custom-made to Lydia Grey's own design, was bedraggled and stained, and hung on her drooping figure like green sacking. Her face, once the joy of the society pix boys, was hardly recognizable for the film of dirt which covered it, and to make matters worse, a thorn briar had laid a bloody track across one cheek.

She was a mess, Jack Higgins decided.

Worse, he was stuck with her.

It seemed the tenth time she had asked the same question: "Are you sure you know where we are?"

And for the tenth time, he made the same reply: "Yeah. My old man was a scoutmaster. Can't lose Jack Higgins. Not even in this damned wilderness. Oh! Sorry." He turned, so she wouldn't see the expression of worry, and looked narrowly at the wall of brush before them, as if trying to pierce its secret with his glance alone.

This time, she wasn't satisfied with his answer. "Why don't you admit we're lost? And for Heaven's sake, stop babying me!"

His lean face, handsome and saturnine as a satyr's, smoothed itself of worry lines and took on the expression of cold contempt with which she was so familiar. "Miss Grey," his words were as cold as his eyes and mouth, "I didn't ask to have you assigned to me. Colonel Bennington

arranged that. When we return, I shall give the old bat my compliments, and tell him to go to hell! Does that make you feel better?"

"The only thing that would make me feel better is the sight of the regimental headquarters. And some food. I'm so hungry..."

He heard the fear in the background of her words, realized suddenly how close to hysteria she was, and stepped to her side. He patted her shoulder gently.

"Take it easy, kid," he cautioned. "Better wait till we get back to quarters before turning on the tears."

She shrugged his hand from her shoulder with an irritable gesture. "When we get back... As if you believe that."

"All right," he said coldly. "So I don't believe it! Does that make you feel better? Do you want me to say we're lost on this damned satellite, a hundred thousand miles from Earth, and we don't have the slightest chance of getting out of this alive? If you do, you're crazy. Jack Higgins isn't built on those lines."

A HEAVY sigh escaped her as she rose from the slimy rock she had been resting on. Her eyes fell to the rent in her blouse through which could be seen the swelling breast, barely hidden by the last of the flimsy bras she had brought along from New York. She made haste to cover the tear, but stopped with the apparent futility of it all.

She moved past him along the faintly defined foot trail leading up the steep hillside. He bit his lips and clenched his fists. Then, sighing as though in echo to her, he ran forward the few steps which separated them and passed her, taking the lead.

His lithe, athletic body bent against the angle of the slope. He did not dig his heels in as she did, but walked

from the whole foot forward. He had tried to show her how to walk the hills they had traversed, but she had perversely refused to listen. Now, it was torture for her to move. Yet, she would rather have died than cry out. She thought she was being brave; he thought she was a damned fool.

He crested the rise, bent low, and as she plodded up to meet him, he suddenly turned and threw himself on her, knocking her sprawling. Before she could cry out in protest, he clamped a rough hand over her mouth.

"There's something moving below!" he whispered hoarsely. "Shut up!"

She wrenched his hand away and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "You almost strangled me, you idiot!"

"Sorry. Didn't have time to warn you. Now, stay put till I take a closer look..."

He crawled away from her, and a couple of seconds later was lost from sight. She looked down at her left hand stretched out before her. The fingers were set and stiff, and she didn't know whether she had set them so in involuntary anger.

THE SUN was dying behind him, and he knew he would be hard to detect. Still, he took care and stayed as close to the ground as was possible. Below, all was still. For a second, he thought the movement he had seen was a case of jangled nerves. Then, quite suddenly, he knew it wasn't nerves. Something moved below.

He blew his breath out in a silent whistle of relief.

The Fradians were not blond....

"Hey, down there," he kept his voice low.

Once more, there was stillness.

"Look up here. I'm an American. Third Headquarters...."

A lighter green something showed

against the much darker green of the brush. The brush parted and five figures came out. Four of them wore steel helmets, stained a mottled tan. The fifth was bare-headed and blond. While the others carried high-power rocket rifles, the blond wore only a holstered blast gun. They were all dressed in the uniforms of the Inter-Allied Army.

Higgins scrambled down to meet them.

THE BLOND'S name was Arndt, and he was a Captain. He looked with speculative curiosity at the girl until her name was mentioned. Then, his eyes went wide.

"Not the Miss Lydia Grey?"

"Yes," Higgins said dourly. "The Miss Lydia Grey, darling of the Third Headquarters, and the niece of Joshua Grey, owner of Grey's Newspaper Alliance. Just to set you straight, Captain."

The fair skin went brick-red. "I don't like your tone, Higgins!" Arndt said coldly.

"I can't help what you like," Higgins shrugged. "I'd like to get back to headquarters. Think that could be arranged?"

Arndt smiled. "Y'know, Higgins, if it weren't that Miss Grey is with you, I'd let you find your way back alone. Fortunately for you, we'll have to do our best to see you get back safely!" There was a scornful edge to the last word.

"Thank the man, Miss Grey," Higgins said, and stepped past the Captain toward the enlisted men standing in a group a few feet off.

One of the four was a buck sergeant; the others were privates. The sergeant was a gangling southerner, hollow-cheeked, slack-jawed and with a blank expression in his eyes. But Higgins knew there was more to the man than showed on the surface.

These were combat troops, not rear echelon men. Higgins acted with deliberate unconcern.

"Shouldn't take more than a couple of hours to get back," he ventured.

The sergeant rolled something around in his jaws turned his head for an instant and spat a brown stream to the ground. "Maybe," he drawled softly in his Georgia accent. "And maybe not. Reckon you could call us advance-advance units."

Higgins mulled that over. "What's between us and our men?" he asked shrewdly.

The sergeant shrugged his bony shoulders. "Hard to tell. We been moving since 'fore sun-up, and we still ain't nowhere."

So they were as lost as he and the girl, Higgins thought. Not a pleasant thought. These men had been cut off from their outfit; perhaps there had been a battle, perhaps merely a skirmish. But from their looks, they had not come out victors.

"I'm Jack Higgins of International Press," he said. "How about giving me the story?"

One of the privates, whose spotty week-old growth of beard showed his youth, whistled gently. "Hey serg! This guy's all right. Didn't you ever read his stuff?"

"Who's got time to read?" the sergeant asked. But the fact that one of his squad knew of the stranger in the field-green of a correspondent's uniform, made an impression on him. "Look, Higgins," he continued after a quick glance toward his Captain.

"This is straight. We're as lost as you and the young lady. Our company got cut up bad at a river crossing last night. Those green devils were waiting for us. We managed to get away. But we're lost now all right."

Like babes in the wood, Higgins thought. He kept his face straight, not wanting them to read what went

on in his mind. He thought back on that fateful day just six months before, when the radios and televisors had blared and shown the strange visitor from another Universe. A huge asteroid, the astronomers had called it, a satellite whirling about the Earth in a direction opposite to that of the familiar moon. Its presence was not known or suspected until it had almost reached the Earth's outer atmospheres. Then, the men on Mount Wilson spotted it and warned the world.

There were many suicides that sunset, and a planet huddled in fear as night fell and the asteroid slowed down in its mad flight. Would it stop, or would it crash into the Earth? For days afterward, scientists puzzled over the strange deceleration and, finally, the complete rest of the asteroid. And when the news was flashed that the strange Heavenly visitor would not crash and that there would be another satellite to the Earth, men knelt and prayed, and the angers of nations against one another were forgotten in universal thankfulness.

A week went by and nothing happened.

Once more, there was only the news of small wars being fought, as if in preparation for the larger wars to follow. Men died on this battlefield or that, and in the privy councils, decisions of attack and defense were made. In the cities and towns and fields, life went on as usual.

Then, in the early dawn of a lovely spring morning on the North American continent, there fell the blow which by nightfall was to be heard and felt around the World. There had been no warning; the tiny orange flares which had suddenly sprung up here and there on the face of the asteroid held no meaning. But the giant rockets which had landed with horrible effect on a number of the large cities of the continent showed the real intent of

the asteroid.

It was war again! But a war of planets this time!

For two months, the Earth had taken a terrible beating. The Nations forgot their quarrels with one another and joined in common cause against the enemy. Another month passed before plans were made and set into motion to bring the fight to the enemy. Giant rocket transports made landings on the asteroid, to land immense quantities of men and material. And, finally, the beachheads were enlarged for further operations.

And with the first of the rocket transports, there came the correspondents and reporters, among them Higgins. He remembered the first prisoners he had seen, humans, green-skinned tall men, slender, with cruel tight-skinned features, men who boasted openly of what they would do when they landed on the Earth. They spoke a flawless unaccented English; it was learned from them that they had intercepted radio broadcasts in English and had taught the language to everyone on their own tiny planet, Fradla.

The Earthmen had learned many things about the Fradians, but could find no trace of their cities.

"Hey, Higgins!"

Jack Higgins started. For an instant, he looked about in bewilderment. Then, he realized he had walked away from the group of soldiers in his self-absorption. It was the sergeant who had called him back to the present.

"You'll wind up at the bottom of the hill walking like that," the sergeant warned him.

HIGGINS GRINNED wryly. His glance shifted from the gaunt unshaven face of the sergeant to the man and woman who were coming toward them. Captain Arndt was talking, his head bobbing now and then,

giving emphasis to his words. Presently, they were in the midst of the five men.

"I was just telling Miss Grey," Captain Arndt said, "that we'd better wait till nightfall before starting back."

Higgins nodded abruptly. "Let's get something right, Captain," he said. "You're the boss from here on in, and you don't have to ask either Miss Grey or myself anything, or discuss your plans with us."

Once more, the fair-skinned face went red. When Arndt spoke again, it was with obvious effort at control. "I don't intend to, Higgins. Sergeant Byrnes."

"Yes, sir?"

"We'll backtrack down this trail. Have two of your squad up ahead about fifteen yards, and two of them in the rear about the same distance. You'll come with Miss Grey, Higgins and myself."

The slender figure of Jack Higgins stiffened, then relaxed. He didn't know why he had broken out at Arndt the way he had. Certainly he hadn't intended for the Captain to take the course he had decided on. It was too late to make amends, however. The command had been given.

The strange sunset, so quickly turning to night, fell on the satellite. And as they started down the trail the man and girl had come up so short a time before, a file of figures broke into the open at the bottom of the hill and spread themselves into the tall grasses which grew in profusion.

The reflected light from the Earth made things almost as bright as sunlight. It was not difficult to follow the faint trail downward. Presently, the two in advance broke into the open, and immediately went down on their bellies. Immediately afterward, the rest, too, sought the shelter of the tall grass.

For a long moment, nothing moved.

Then, light glinted on the upraised barrel of a rocket rifle, and with the signal, the entire group arose and started swiftly for the patch of scrub forest several hundred yards before them.

And as they moved into action, so did the row of figures which had been lying as though in wait for them.

IT WAS the sergeant who saw them first. His rifle went to his shoulder in a swift movement, and an instant later a tiny rocket sped from it to land before the center of the oncoming wave of green men. It exploded with a dull roar, and when the smoke cleared, several dozen bodies were to be seen lying twisted and motionless on the ground.

But no one had time to look.

Higgins threw a wild look at the girl, who seemed stunned by the mysterious appearance of the Fradians, and hurled himself in a headlong tackle at the girl. She went down as though she had been pole-axed.

Something fell close to where Higgins and the girl lay, and a hoarse voice, thick with a Southern accent said, "Crawl back to the brush, Higgins, 'fore they let go with their fireballs."

"Damn it! You'll have to help me with her," Higgins growled. "I think she's out."

"Miss Grey! Where is she?" a third voice broke in.

"She's here, sir," Sergeant Byrnes said. "Help us with her."

She was dead weight and proved an almost unbearable burden. Byrnes' squad was laying down a heavy barrage of rocket fire, but the Fradians had unlimbered their own guns, and now the orange fireballs were dropping all about them. Liquid fire dripped from the exploding balls and ran in flaming rivulets into every hollow on the ground. One of the squad

suddenly came to his feet, his clothing ablaze, and ran screaming into the night. Before he had taken more than four steps, he was a flaming torch. A second man leaped erect, tried to beat out the flame with his hands, and died on a choking sound. Then, a third and fourth man fell victim to the chemical fire let loose against them.

Only Sergeant Byrnes, Captain Arndt, Jack Higgins and the girl escaped.

Lydia Grey came to in the nick of time. She felt the hands gripping her and choked back a scream. The sound she made told the three men she had come to her senses. Her fellow correspondent took momentary command.

"Lydia. Run for the brush! We're being attacked."

Higgins looked back and narrowed his eyes against the brilliant light thrown out by the exploding fireballs. He saw dozens of figures charging them. "Hurry it up!" he urged. "They're on our tail."

Fifty more yards, thirty, then only twenty. They were gasping as if with their last breath. But now, they no longer cared that they were in the open, or that the grass was only ankle high. The strong green fibres only slowed them down; it could not stop them.

"Ten more yards," Arndt gasped. He had hold of Lydia Grey's wrist and was actually dragging her in his wake.

"Safe," Sergeant Byrnes whispered exultantly as the forest rose close at hand.

But the Sergeant was wrong. A double line of men stepped forward from behind the first line of trees and stood eagerly awaiting them.

"HALT, OR DIE!"

Jack Higgins saw their leader raise the strange weapon to his hip, caught the swift move of Captain

Arndt's hand toward the blast pistol in his own holster, and chopped swiftly down at Arndt's hand. The pistol clattered to one side.

The correspondent had taken the Captain's measure. The man was quick to anger, and as quick to action. When the command to "Halt," had been given, Higgins instinctively acted before the other. He had been only in time.

But not in time to fend off the lashing fist Arndt threw at him. It caught Higgins on the chin and he collapsed like a punctured balloon.

Then, the green men were all around the four Earth people. A booted foot caught Higgins in the side. He moaned in pain, and as the same foot drove into his side again, he tried to roll with it. He didn't succeed. Another kick and again agonizing pain.

"Stop! You'll kill him!" a woman's voice came to him, but muted, as if from a long distance. Then, something caught him a blow on the temple and everything dissolved in a dark spiral which fell to a bottomless depth.

THERE WAS pain under his armpits, and shocks of pain along the under part of his biceps. He opened his eyes and full consciousness flowed over him.

He was being dragged along by several of the green men. As if they felt his awakening, they stopped and held him erect. He shoved weakly at them.

One of the men pushed him forward so that he staggered. "Walk," he ordered.

Strength returned slowly, though reason came back in a rush. The others. Where were they? It was hard to see. They were in a passage of some sort, a tunnel of rock. Then, his ears caught the sound of footsteps ahead. Still, the turmoil in his brain did not

lessen. Were those also the footsteps of the girl and Byrnes and Arndt?

Once more, he felt the rough hand shoving him forward, and this time he went gladly; almost at a trot.

Now, his mind was functioning at its accustomed pace. The floor of this tunnel was smooth as a concrete pavement, and though the light was dim, he could see that the sides of it were also smooth. The tunnel wound around on itself, descending as it did. It ended with startling abruptness.

Standing before a pair of gigantic doors was a large group of green men, their uniforms, made of a synthetic material, gleaming as though covered with luminescence. And in their midst, huddled close as if in common protection, were Lydia Grey, Sergeant Byrnes, and Captain Arndt.

They saw him at the same time. Arndt's face darkened, Byrnes' features relaxed their taut look, and the girl's eyes widened. For a second, Higgins' belly contorted in warmth; he would have sworn there was joy in her eyes. Then her glance swept downward, and he was no longer sure.

One of the green-men stepped forward. He was somewhat shorter than the rest, but his face was more cruel, his eyes more cold, his expression more unrelenting. For a second, he looked deep into Higgins' eyes, and when the other returned his glance, the green man spat full into the Earthman's face. As Higgins' hand went up to wipe the spittle away, one of the guards slapped him with an open palm.

"Were I Yodar," the green man said, "I would not take prisoners. There must be a reason for it. Well, take care! It would give me pleasure to have you break for freedom."

But if the Fradian expected a revolt, he was doomed to disappointment. The tall, lean figure in the

stained uniform merely tightened his lips.

The Fradian laughed. "We understand each other then, Good." He whirled on the others. "It goes for all of you! One suspicious move..."

Only the labored sound of their breathing gave him answer.

The Fradian cocked his head suddenly at the loud rumbling sound which came from behind the huge doors. Then, the cruel face widened in a broad grin. The vast doors slid open and a gigantic cage was disclosed.

"In, all of you," the stocky Fradian commanded.

FROM THE instant the cage began its descent, Jack Higgins' news sense seemed reawakened. He was still squeezed by the knotty grip of pain with every movement, but he felt it only in his subconscious. Now, he was aware of and felt the importance of what was happening to him. And not only to himself, but to the others with him.

They had been taken prisoners.

The first known prisoners taken by the terrible people from this dark asteroid....

Every one of his senses, trained through years of learning and experience to extract from externals the facts to be used, was now completely on the alert. If, he thought, escape were possible, the information he would be able to bring back would be both invaluable to the staffs of the Inter-Alled armies, and news that would be a world scoop for his paper.

Someone in authority named Yodar had ordered their capture. Perhaps not theirs specifically but prisoners of one kind or another. There was a reason for it, obviously. Higgins wracked his brain searching for the reason.

The cage stopped with the lightness

of one feather falling against another, the doors slid open and the length of a long corridor was revealed. Green-skinned guards stood at attention in regular intervals down the length of the corridor. Men and women, not in the familiar Fradian uniform, moved swiftly along the marble-like flooring into one room or another. Nor did they pay the smallest attention to the prisoners as they marched along enclosed behind their wall of guards.

Presently, the squad stopped before a pair of huge graven doors before which stood two green men. The stocky warrior said something in a strange tongue to one of the guards, and the man turned and stepped into the room. He was back shortly, holding the doors wide open for entrance. Only the squad leader came into the room with his prisoners.

The room into which they stepped was large and square in shape. Light from a hidden source gave off an even glow, and as they moved deeper into the room, they became aware of the soft beat of hidden engines doing mysterious work. But all these were set in the background of a more important fact—the room's Fradian occupants. These were five in number, three men and two women. They were seated about a table on which many papers lay scattered, and before two of the men were a couple of triangular-shaped microphones.

Higgins noted the snow-white hair of one of the men, in contrast to the auburn of the rest. It was this one who received the salute of the stocky Fradian who had been their guide.

"There were four others, Yodar, but they died in battle."

"These will do."

The stocky one saluted again, did an about-face and stepped from the room without another word.

Yodar's skin had the look of green satin; it was smooth as a child's. His

expression was one of studied calculation, the others', of studied indifference. He fingered his chin for a couple of seconds, while his dark eyes moved over their figures as though in appraisal. Then, he nodded shortly and stood up. Moving deliberately to the matted wall at his left, he motioned the four to his side.

"You will observe," he said, "that this is a scale map of a part of one of your continents, and embraces all of the country called United States. This country is the arsenal for all the other nations, the center of arms manufacturing. We have recently intercepted radio messages emanating from the secret capitol of the country which ask for agreement from the other nations on an all-out atomic war against us.

"Acceptance would be a folly beyond endurance!"

"What do you mean?" Jack Higgins found himself demanding.

"It would be complete and final extinction, not only for the human races on both our worlds, but also a planetary catastrophe."

Yodar went on, tapping the map as he talked: "The peoples of your planet know nothing of us because of the short-sightedness of a faction within what was, until recently, the governing body of Fradia. Now, we are split in two. On one side, to use figures of speech, 'good', and on the other, 'bad'." A gentle smile broke on the sensitive lips of the old man. "I see the Captain smiles. Perhaps it is his thought that we will be easier prey now that we are split? If so, let him dismiss it instantly. But I digress. Come. Let us make ourselves comfortable while we talk."

The old man went back to the table and motioned the Earth people to pull up chairs close by. "I think it is high time that our purpose in first coming to your planet was ex-

plained, and our desires made known," he said. "We are from a Universe beyond the farthest reaches of your telescopes, and it took us the equivalent of two light years in travel to reach your own Universe. In all our travels, past the thousands of planets which seemed habitable, we found none whose atmosphere was acceptable, or whose essential elements were so akin to ours as this Earth you inhabit.

"This whirling asteroid we are on and in whose shell we live, took a hundred years in the making, and five years in the launching. The death of the planet we lived on was forecast for several hundreds of years before the fact. And not only the death of the planet, but also the death of the entire Universe of which we were a small part. Therefore, we are escapees from certain doom.

"Although you are not aware of it, we have been residents of your upper atmospheres for two years. This, because we had to make sure that there was life here to sustain the twenty millions of our people who made the inter-spacial journey. More, we had to learn all that was possible of the kinds of peoples on your planet; and whether they would accept us peaceably. There were those among us who argued from the first for war. I was not one of these. But I and those with me were a minority. You know the result.

"Now, I desire a change. Peace. But not peace at a price. I want absolute peace."

"So that what?" Higgins took it upon himself to act as spokesman.

"So that this war shall be ended at no further cost."

"Being the aggressors," Higgins said, "I would say—off-hand—and of course not in an official manner—that you wouldn't stand a chance. Any terms made would have to be made by the nations of the Earth. The attack

which began the conflict was a sheer act of aggression, and a vow was made to continue the war until all of you were eliminated."

Yodar spread his hands in a gesture of resignation. "You must believe me when I reiterate this conflict was not of our doing. But we had no choice in the matter. Now, we have forced the issue. I know peace can come much more quickly than is thought possible, but it will take cooperation. You and the young lady must bring our point of view to the notice of your governments."

"If not?"

"Orlando will first destroy your planet, and because he has an overwhelming preponderance of fighting men, will conquer us who oppose him internally. I assure you he has the power to do it. There are many things of which you cannot possibly be aware, one of those being that Orlando has the power-machines in his orbit of influence, and with those can do irreparable damage."

"Won't destroying our planet destroy yours?" Higgins asked shrewdly.

"Remember that we came suddenly into your sight; we can leave as mysteriously and suddenly. And from a distance beyond danger, Orlando can unleash powers greater than the atomic bombs of which you are so proud."

"I'll buy that on your word," Higgins said. "What's your proposition?"

"This, Fradia is composed of two cities, fifty miles below the surface, impregnable to assault from above, even to atom bombs. We here control one of the cities, the smaller one, Rodani. Orlando controls Mitani. We also control the gates and pressure chambers from the surface to our city."

"Pressure chambers?" Higgins asked blankly. It dawned on him then that there hadn't been any change in pressure, and if, as the old man said, they were fifty miles below the sur-

face, there should have been a tremendous change.

Yodar smiled again. "We know many marvels of science which would be of benefit to the peoples of your planet, if peace could be obtained. The trouble is that Orlando has gone too far. He knows it, and is prepared for any consequences. Well, we are too. Civil war, if it means death to all. Earthman, with the help of the peoples of your planet, we can win. Will you try to obtain that help?"

Jack Higgins felt the deep sense of conviction in the old man's voice, and was stirred by it as he had never been stirred by anything before. He had seen and been part of two world wars, and his experiences had only hardened the cynical outlook he had on life. He had the fortune, or misfortune as he called it, of being on the inside of the many shady deals undertaken by the State Departments of various nations, and politicians and slogan-peddlers made no impression on him.

Yodar was of another stripe. The consciousness of the old man's strength and moral power which he had felt dimly at first, had grown with every word. And now, at the last, Higgins had no doubts of the other's sincerity. There remained only the question of how Higgins was to get back to Earth.

"WE ARE fully prepared for this civil war," Yodar assured the other. "The instant you leave on your mission I will set the machinery in motion. Then, Orlando will be forced to withdraw his fighting men from the surface, and the Earthmen will have free play above. Now, here," he gathered up a folio of papers; thrust them into an envelope, sealed it and handed it to Higgins, "are the full-scale plans we had drawn up for the moment of invasion. They show the various air vents and lift openings by which your armies can obtain entrance

to our cities. They also are detailed as to strategic points, both strong and weak, and give a close approximation of the dispersal of Orlando's inner defense forces.

"A ship is in readiness to leave at this very instant. It waits only your presence."

"I'm ready to go," Higgins said. "But first—"

"Yes?"

"What about my friends? Miss Grey is also a correspondent. It wouldn't be fair or right that I should have the exclusive on this."

"Well, don't play the hog, Higgins," the girl said. "And besides, I think it'll be more fun down here. You can have the glory. I'll manage without your gentle presence."

He saw her fingers go up to stroke the side of her jaw, and he knew she did it to remind him she had not forgotten his flying tackle.

"I don't think we'll miss him too much, do you, Captain Arndt?"

"Not at all," Arndt said. "Not at all." He gave Higgins the full benefit of a wolfish grin.

"Good! And now, we've settled that, mind if I offer a suggestion, Miss Grey? You've always beefed about there being so little to report for your feminine readers. Perhaps now you'll have a field day?"

"In more ways than one, Mister Newshawk, and thank you."

YODAR WORE a slightly bewilder expression at all this. He felt the undercurrent of hostility between the man and woman, but couldn't understand it. "Do not worry about your friends," he hastened to assure Higgins. "They will be taken care of."

And quite suddenly, something which had lain at the back of Higgins' mind came to the fore. "I hope they will be," he said.

"You have my word," Yodar replied. And then, as if in answer to the questions the other was afraid to ask: "I gave explicit orders for your capture. The four who died were killed by some of Orlando's men. Our viewing scopes followed you and the others until you started to cross open ground—"

"How did you know all that?"

Yodar's eyes twinkled. He flicked a switch at the side of one of the microphones. The low sound of a voice was heard, speaking in a strange tongue: "A central listening post," Yodar explained. "His voice is recorded on wire; messengers arrive and depart at intervals with the information received by the robot listening post. You and the woman were spotted the instant you came into the viewing screen, and we knew by your uniforms you were correspondents. It was then I decided on your capture, if possible. Had Gaga and his men arrived sooner, there would have been no deaths."

There were no longer any questions. "I'm ready, Yodar," Higgins said. "That is, I will be in a second." The familiar, twisted grin appeared on his lips as he walked to the girl. His eyes were almost hidden behind narrowed lids so that she could not read them. "Luck, kid," he said. "I'll get in touch with your Uncle first thing and tell him you're all right."

Her own eyes went wide at his words. They were unexpected, as was the warmth of them. She swallowed hard, managed a smile. "You're not such a bad guy after all," she said. Then, her fingers were on his lapels, drawing him toward her, and a second later the sweet warmth of her lips met his in a swift caress. "Luck, Jack..."

"One last thought," Yodar interrupted. He depressed a tiny lever close to his hand, and a second later the doors swung wide. "Haste, Orlan-

do, too, knows of the Earth's decision to use atom bombs."

THERE WERE three men in the squad accompanying Jack Higgins. Their leader was the stocky Gaga. The newsman wasn't happy about Yodar's choice of a pilot, but there was nothing to be done about it. Jack Higgins' recollection of the slap he had received from the man was still fresh in his mind. But if the memory was fresh in Higgins' mind, it seemed to have slipped from the stocky Fradian's. If there was no friendliness in his manner, there was at least an acceptance—even though cold—of Higgins as an ally.

But no matter what his feelings, he had committed himself to a course. He stepped along with the others down the length of the corridor to a pair of now-familiar closed lift doors. These were opposite in direction from those from which they had arrived. And when the lift came, they went downward for the space of a couple of seconds. When the gates opened, Higgins' mouth popped open in surprise. A moving platform, much like a horizontal escalator, confronted them. A low and shallow series of steps led to the platform. He followed Gaga and the others onto the moving roadway and slumped onto the long bench which ran the length of the entire car.

For a moment or so, the platform moved in the soft interior light of the building. Then, suddenly, they were out of the building and on an immense bridge, supported by slender legs of metal. And now, their platform picked up speed. He looked down and saw that there were other platforms below, and below those still more, until only the dimly seen street showed its flat surface. He realized they were on the very topmost of the platforms, and that it was several hundred feet above street level.

He saw also the immensity of Yodar's city and the architectural simplicity of its design. There were other things to note in passing: The exterior light, brighter but yet as soft as that indoors, the air so spring-like, the curving ceiling of smooth granite, as though it were machined and cut to measure, reaching its arch fifty miles above their heads.

"How come we're the only ones on this platform?" he asked.

"We have the highest priority," Gaga said shortly.

Higgins thought, I don't like you, and, brother, some day you and I are going to tangle about that slap.

"Here we are," Gaga said.

Higgins could only stare at what confronted them. The platform had come to a stop by the side of a stationary platform, at the far end of which was a metal chute which went straight up to end in the curving dome above. He followed Gaga and the others down the platform to the edge of the chute. And once more they were confronted by closed doors, which, when opened by the press of a button at the side, revealed the interior of an elevator.

"This lift will take us to one of the hangars," Gaga explained. He gave the Earthman a sidelong look. "There are others, also, most of which end at ground level."

"You mean this thing goes straight up in the air fifty miles without support?" Higgins was stupefied by what Gaga had said.

"You are surprised?" Gaga smiled. "We have even greater wonders for you to see." He stepped into the elevator, and shortly afterwards the low hum of the efficient motors told them they were on their way up.

THE HANGAR was a vast, low cavern, the ends of which were lost in darkness. Directly before them

were several dozen sleek space ships whose design meant them for speed. The hangar was swarming with green warriors. Immediately on their arrival, they were brought to the commander of the hangar, a tall, lean man with the look of tautness to his face which Higgins associated with all airmen, irrespective of planet.

The commander had been informed of their arrival, and he took them personally to one of the small ships and shook hands with the Earthman.

"May your way be lighted by good fortune," he said.

A couple of minutes later, a crane was hoisting the tiny ship to the cavern ceiling. Gaga was alone in the pilot's compartment. The other two kept Higgins company in the main cabin.

"How much higher do we get lifted?" Higgins asked.

"Look," one of the green men said, pointing with his thumb to the closest porthole.

"We're flying! But I didn't hear—"

"The engines of these craft are silent."

Higgins sighed. "I only hope they don't take pot shots at us before we are able to land."

"They won't even see us," the same man said. "Our anti-light deflector will make us invisible until Gaga sends his wave message. The ship is painted jet-black, and the deflector will throw aside any light which might make us visible."

"And they say the Chinese are clever," Higgins said in a whisper.

"We've been on our way thirty seconds," the second green man said reflectively. "But the sphere below hasn't increased in size to any degree."

The pleasant expression of the first green man faded. A worried look broke on his forehead. "I think I'll see what Gaga has to say about this."

The door to the pilot's compartment

closed on him. Several seconds went soundlessly by. Presently, the door opened again. And a man staggered out. The man's hands were tearing the clothes from his body. The green skin was now so dark it looked black.

"Gaga ... betrayed ... betrayed us..." The lips opened again but only to let out a single agonized shriek.

Then, the man exploded. Flesh and blood and bones spattered the walls, ceiling, floor, in an oozy mess that momentarily nauseated the Earthman. Then, he was aware of a popping sound, a man's voice screaming, "No!" and he looked up in time to see the second Fradian tearing at his clothes as the first did. And seconds later, he also flew to horrifying bits.

"Give me a chance to do it to you," Gaga snarled from the doorway. A small pistol-shaped weapon was in his right hand. The muzzle of the weapon was fixed unwaveringly on the Earthman's body. "Toos the envelope to me." He stooped to pick it up, but kept his eyes on Higgins. "Now. I should exterminate you also, but perhaps Orlando might have a use for you. Keep in mind, Earth vermin, that I beg the chance to kill you."

"Big talk from a little guy," the Earthman said. "But I suppose the little pop gun in the fist makes you boss."

"This is one of the weapons which will make us all masters."

The Earthman measured the distance between them. Too far. He could never make it to stop the other from pulling the trigger. But if he could get just three feet closer...

Suddenly, Higgins slumped to the bench. "Guess I know when I've lost. Go ahead. Do what you want."

Gaga grinned. He had had teeth and they showed in a crooked row. The grin looked more like a snarl. He came closer until he was but a

couple of feet from the man slumped on the bench.

"You will be like this mess of scum on the floor and walls," Gaga said. His voice was suddenly hoarse and thick. "A single pellet deep within you, and seconds later—you saw what happened, Earth vermin?"

Higgins leaned back against the sloping metal wall. His mind raced. He's close enough. If I can only get enough drive in my right leg? Now or never...

He left the bench in a headlong tackle. The Fradian tried to bring the gun in his hand to a point, but a flying leap knocked him backward against the opposite bench. Pounding fists beat a tattoo against his face, and suddenly a knee drove its bony cap deep into his groin. Gaga screamed in agony, dropped the pistol and tried to bring his hands down to his groin. Again the knee came up and pain rode through the lower part of the Fradian's body in a blinding flash. Then, something slammed against the bone along the lower side of his jaw and the world went black.

The tall, slender man took a couple of slow backward steps and looked down at what had been a man. There was only a bloody mess of what had once been Gaga's head. Higgins looked at the pistol in his hand. The butt was dripping blood and tiny slivers of bone and grey matter.

He couldn't remember how the pistol had come to his hand.

NOW WHAT? he asked himself. He looked up through red-rimmed eyes and saw the door of the pilot's cabin swinging lazily back and forth on its hinges. He staggered forward and into the tiny enclosure. A complicated and unfamiliar instrument panel with the dials in a language he couldn't read.

His glance swung emptily to the

glass port in front of him. A dark mass was rising before him. He stared at it for a full three seconds. Then, comprehension dawned. They were coming back to Fradia. But to where on the asteroid? What was it the green man had screamed before he had died? "Gaga... betrayed us..." Of course. Gaga had set an automatic course for an Orlando landing area. If only he could get the ship back to manual control.

Now, he could see the spears of earth he knew to be mountains, blossom into hills, and shortly their heights were appreciable. His fingers flew to the various dials and levers. A wild shout of exultation broke from his lips. The ship had suddenly wavered in its downward course. He had found the right lever. Now, his hands swept to the stick.

Just a couple of seconds, he prayed.

Just two.

But they were already in the canyon between two pinnacles of basalt. A force beyond his power to control was dragging the ship downward into a black void which suddenly opened at the wide V at the bottom of the gorge.

"COME OUT with your hands up," a voice commanded.

It could have been the same hangar from which the tiny ship had left. Even the uniforms of the men were the same. But there was a difference. A dozen guns pointed their blank faces at him, and he knew those holes could belch tiny pellets into him which would result in bits of flesh and fat and bone flying about. His hands were high above his head as he stepped down from the tiny ladder.

Two of the Fradians clambered into the slender hull of the tiny ship. Presently, they reappeared and stepped smartly before a tall, heavy-built man in a uniform unlike the others.

They saluted the tall one.

"Gaga is dead, beaten to death with the butt of a bubble gun. There were two others, but they are no longer in the flesh."

The tall man smiled, and Jack Higgins felt a sudden chill. It was like Death smiling.

"Our Earth friend handled himself well. Alas, in vain. We have the papers Gaga reported he carried." He turned to face the Earthman. "A pity. But I have always maintained Yodar is a fool. Soon we will make a change. He will be a dead fool! Bring the Earthman to my chambers."

The marvels of Yodar's city were as nothing to what Higgins saw in Mitani as they were taking him to Orlando's palace. Now, he was in a deep, comfortable contour chair facing the other. He noted the almost carved features, the dominant chin and nose, the thin, cruel lips and the open look of contempt in the green man's eyes.

Orlando was behind a curved desk on which were scattered the papers the Earthman had been entrusted with. Orlando's fingers tapped the papers. "Not a bad plan. The old man is clever, but his cleverness is really a weakness. He knows we possess the power to win; he is a pacifist, and that is his trouble. I don't know," Orlando's voice trailed off in speculation, then came back at the end of a sigh: "Civil war. Ridiculous! Two days and it would be ended. But perhaps he thought the diversion would be enough. What do you think, Earthman?"

Higgins caught the deep note of amusement in the other's voice. He felt anger rise in his breast, but controlled it quickly. There was a chance, although it was faint at best. But still, a chance.

"I think Yodar's over-all idea of peace and a settlement of the Fradian

peoples on Earth is not a bad idea."

"I agree with Yodar on the score of settling on your planet," Orlando said. "But peace..." He laughed.

"Yodar told me you have weapons so powerful you could destroy the Earth," Higgins used his words with care. "I don't doubt it. Nor that you could be at a safe distance when it happened. But tell me, what would you gain by that?"

"An extreme case," Orlando said. He turned thoughtful. "True, I would gain little except a personal satisfaction. It might take a couple of more light years to find another planet..."

"And perhaps another battle."

"H'm! I see what you mean. I gather you want me to seek peace?"

"Why don't you stop playing games with me?" the Earthman asked. "I can't speak for anyone but myself. Maybe I'm qualified, maybe I'm not. I don't know. But this I do know. There are maybe ten millions of your people doing the fighting. You have five hundred million men against you. They can plaster this tiny planet with thousands of atom bombs. A couple might get into those vents you've made. Boom! That would be the end of your dream."

"And the end of the asteroid, too. It might also mean the end of your planet, my Earth friend."

"We are a strange people," Higgins said. "We value liberty above all else."

"A virtue, but a mistaken one. You think your leaders would risk certain destruction to slavery? Don't answer that; I don't care what the answer is. I am going to do a surprising thing. I am going to allow you to go back to Earth, as Yodar wanted."

"But you will go back with a message from me, not from Yodar. The message is simply this: The capitulation of the Earth's forces, peace at

my terms, and the acknowledgment of my rule over your planet. The Earth will have—I will be generous—ten days in which to decide."

The words were forced from Jack Higgins: "You're crazy!"

The thick shoulders heaved in a shrug, but the eyes of Orlando turned icy. "Rodani will fall in two days. Then all of Fradia will be mine. What is more, I will not destroy the Earth, but will destroy all living beings on it. There will be enough room for our twenty millions of people. Perhaps I will not destroy the entire population; perhaps I will leave enough to serve us as slaves. Shortly after your arrival on Earth, I will eliminate every living Earthman on Fradia, as easily and surely as a bubble-gun snuffs out life."

The Earthman did not see him press anything, but a second after he finished talking, two guards appeared in the room from an inner chamber.

"Take him to Gorat," Orlando ordered. He turned to Higgins for the last time. "Your ship is in readiness, with an automatic pilot set to take you back to your planet. Ten days from now, Earthman. Keep it in mind."

GENERAL HAGGERTY paced the length of the office. Grouped about a wide table were the chiefs of staff of the Inter-Allied Nations. Jack Haggerty, pale and drawn, stood stiff and straight in the center of the room.

Haggerty, short, wiry, lantern jaw jutting further than usual, stopped his restless pacing. "Damn him! There were sixteen million fighting men up there. Not a single man left. Not one." His voice held a thread of awe.

"Orlando promised their deaths, sir," Higgins said.

"I know, Higgins," the General said. "You tried to warn us. I take the blame on my own shoulders."

There were murmurs of dissent from the group. The General turned to face them. "The blame is mine. But great as the loss was, we face a greater one. The decision is ours to make. Gentlemen?"

"General Haggerty." A tall, stoop-shouldered man with the stars of a General Of The Army on his collar band, arose and spoke: "There is no decision to make. I think I can speak for all of us. We must fight to the end—"

"Wait!" Jack Higgins broke in. "To the end of what? Stop thinking in terms of soldiers and airmen. The entire Earth is in danger."

"What would you propose, that we hide our heads?" the tall man asked biting.

General Haggerty held up his hands for quiet. "We know and appreciate how much you have gone through, the risks you took, and even the knowledge you have of these Fradian scoundrels. But it's unthinkable to give in to their demands."

There was a unanimous chorus of assent.

"I beg the General's pardon, and that of the Council of Military Government," the newsmen said. "I did not suggest that. I merely said Orlando's weapons are beyond our comprehension. Now, we no longer have a foothold on Fradia. May I show how such a foothold can be obtained? Orlando has given us ten days; nine now. The ship I flew in on was never sighted, nor was its presence known until I landed. It is the first ship ever taken by the Earth forces. And it is Orlando's first and last mistake. For on that ship is something he forgot about. I suppose because it is commonplace to him.

"On that ship is something called a light-deflector. They paint their ships jet-black and set the deflector up and the ship becomes invisible.

How long would it take to make enough of these ships?"

The uniformed men around the table looked at each other. General Haggerty tapped his lips. Then he shook his head. "We don't have enough time, I'm afraid. Nine days... Perhaps a hundred large ships. I'm certain our technicians could untangle the mystery of the light-deflector in very short order. The problem of construction, however, would be too great. Perhaps a hundred ships."

"Well, sir," Higgins said, "we have a good idea, from what I can remember, of where some of the escape vents are. A hundred ships could land a hundred thousand men. Picked men, an army of volunteer suicides. You spoke of a weapon you have just developed. Arm these men with those weapons. They can occupy the attentions of the Fradians until more ships can bring help and supplies. It is a fighting chance."

"The boy is right!" General Haggerty shouted. "By God, he's right!"

"And when the fleet is in readiness, sir," Higgins went on, "I would like to go along. I'd like to be in on the kill."

MYSTERIOUS shadows moved, seemingly without source. They came from a yawning blackness that held no dimension of size, so that it appeared as if the larger darkness was giving birth to hundreds of smaller darknesses.

Jack Higgins stood to one side and watched through the treated glass that was like a band across the material of his head piece. The glass could be looked through only from the inside; from the outside it was as one with the rest of the uniform, a blackness against which light rebounded. He was still filled with the wonder of what had been accomplished by the Earth's scientists in the

six days which had passed since his arrival on the single-seater ship Orlando had sent him on from Fradia.

He saw the vast shape of the space ship which had carried a thousand men and equipment from the Earth, saw the triple lines of fighting men, each encased in the light-deflecting uniforms, each man carrying a vibration-gun. He turned to the Colonel standing close beside him.

"I guess I'd better take this off, Colonel Mains," he said. "The marker showing the vent is a hundred yards up the flank of that hill. I'll get behind a boulder and slip the uniform off, just in case Orlando has spotters watching for my return."

The Colonel's reply vibrated against his earphones within the head piece: "Very well, Higgins. Now, once more: What is the signal?"

"The removal of the marker. You will know the vent is open and unguarded."

"Very well. Our fleet hovers above and will land the instant we take the bridgehead. Good luck, Higgins, and remember, the fate of the entire expedition is in your hands."

The lean, handsome face of the war correspondent showed a momentary unhappiness, then once more hardened into lines of steel-hard determination. Once more, he was playing the part of bait, but this time of his own choosing.

A kiss... The girl Lydia Grey had kissed him—and his whole life had changed. All the months of being with her and working with her had drawn them closer than he'd realized. Suddenly, it was clear in his mind: She was the sole reason why he was risking his life. Life and living would be empty and without purpose for him, without her. He was in love, unreasonably and desperately in love.

He had turned his profile to the Colonel. Now, he faced the other.

"Might as well get to it," he said. "And good luck to you, sir, and the rest."

A wave of the hand, and he was off to the shelter of the boulder behind which he would remove the uniform....

TWO MEN stood close guard on him, their hands on the butts of their bubble-guns. He had thought to be taken directly to Orlando, but instead had been brought to another room. His freedom extended to the four walls. He did not know how long a time had passed since they had brought him to this room, and all his questioning had been answered by shrugging shoulders on the part of the guards.

Suddenly, the door opened and two men marched in.

"Orlando will see the Earthman now," one of them announced.

Jack Higgins studied the cold, cruel face of the man in the chair, and hated him. And with every word that dripped like venom from the thin lips of Orlando, Higgins' hate grew.

"I told you, Earthman, that Yodar's city would fall in short order." He wagged a finger in the Earthman's face. "But you didn't tell me of the woman I would find. Ab! I did not know Earth women were so beautiful. A very pleasant surprise indeed. It caused a change in my plans, you know. My men are weary of fighting. They must have joy in the leisure hours to follow. I think I will exterminate the men of the Earth and leave the women. Not a bad idea. What do you think of it?"

It was as if a red veil fell across Higgins' eyes. The blood rushed to his face and every muscle in his body became taut. He leaned forward across the desk, thrust his face as close to the other's as he could, and shouted: "I think it stinks!"

Orlando pulled back in shock at the sudden unexpected action. Then, he caught the quick movement of the guards' hands toward the weapons they carried, and his voice rose sharply: "Hold!" Then his head turned slowly to the man before him. "I think it is an excellent idea! And I think also that you are angry because of the woman. But your emotions do not interest me. What is the message you have brought?"

"They agree to your terms, but must sign a formal agreement. My government asks that you grant them another week."

"Not an instant more than the ten days first agreed on," Orlando said. "Before the dawn of the eleventh day, I shall invade. And the forces of the Earth, no matter how many oppose me, will be destroyed as instantly as those who were here."

"They were horrified by what happened here," Higgins' voice was barely above a whisper. "They couldn't imagine a weapon of such power."

"Air, my dear Earth fool! Air compressed into a capsule of metal. So low a temperature as body heat breaks the shell of the inner capsule, expansion follows, and poof!" Orlando spread his hands suddenly as a vision of exploding bodies filled Higgins' mind. "A hail of these capsules fell on the Earthmen, and soon there was only a crimson carpet on the ground to speak of their whereabouts."

"The bubble guns. . ."

"Large and small," Orlando said. "My most powerful weapon. The Earth will be wise to capitulate. I can be magnanimous."

There was a short interval of silence, broken at last by the war correspondent; "Was the girl the only prisoner taken?"

Orlando smiled. "Her friends are also here, as well as Yodar. The final victory would not taste as well if Yo-

dar were not here. Why do you ask?"

"I have a message for the girl from her Uncle. He says—"

"I'll have her brought in," Orlando broke in. He signalled to one of the guards.

It seemed he was gone but a minute. And with him was Lydia Grey. Her eyes went wide at sight of the tall man in the uniform of a war correspondent standing before Orlando, and a tremulous smile broke on her lips.

"Jack! Oh Jack! I never thought to see you again."

There was no one else in the room, so far as Higgins was concerned. Had Orlando told him it would be death to go to her, it would not have stayed the Earthman's feet. For a second, her body was taut against his, then it relaxed and he could feel her strain to him as if she wanted to press herself within him.

"How nice," Orlando said. "But I thought you said her Uncle had a message for her?"

"He has," Higgins whispered into the golden hair pressed against his face. "It's the same as mine. He loves you, and knows everything will turn out well."

She drew her head back and lifted her eyes to look deep within his own. "I guess I've loved you from the first, but I wanted to show you I could take it."

He was still lost in the moment of discovery. She loved him, had loved him from the first. He felt a hand on his shoulder, turned and saw Orlando was behind him. The Fradian was smiling, but the smile extended no further than the lips. Then, something exploded against the side of Higgins' head, and he staggered drunkenly to one side.

"I thought I made it clear the girl is mine," Orlando said. "You did not understand. Explain the fact to him!"

There were a half dozen guards in the room. They converged on the Earthman who was still swaying from the blow he had received from one of them.

"Not!" Lydia Grey screamed. "Please, Orlando..."

"Very well. Throw him in with the others until I need him again."

THE THROBBING at his temple was a minor pain, nothing to the pain and fear he felt at the thought of what might be happening to Lydia at the hands of Orlando. The other men in the room with him could only stare helplessly as he paced from wall to wall in his torment.

It was the Sergeant who took Higgins out of the black mood he was in. "That ain't going to help, 'fella," he said. "What we gotta do is get out of this place."

"An impossible thing," Yodar's voice was low with despair. "And assuming we did. How would we escape to the upper surface?"

"Give me one of those bubble-guns and I'd manage, somehow, or die in the attempt," Arndt said. He was cold with fury, and his voice shook in the passion of his desire.

Higgins shook his head violently, and motioned them close. "We've got to get topside," he whispered. "There's a whole army of specialists waiting up there. Yodar, do you know anything about this place we're in, the layout of it, and how we can get to the hangar I was brought from?"

"I know Orlando's palace well," Yodar said. "And once we are free, I can get you to the hangar. Getting out of here will be the problem. There must be a thousand men guarding the palace."

"Cripes! Maybe we can set fire to the joint," Sergeant Byrnes sounded his disgust.

"That's the big deal our boys have.

Fire. You can't extinguish it, can't drown it, can't do anything until it burns to nothing whatever is in its way. A new discovery our technicians have made. But how the hell can we get our men down here?"

"You mean they're up there waiting?" Captain Arndt demanded.

"Yep. Waiting for my signal," Higgins said.

"Then all we've got to worry about is getting you and Miss Grey to the surface," Arndt said.

Higgins curled his lip and narrowed his eyes. "Guess I misjudged you, Captain. By the same token you're misjudging me. We all leave together, if you know what I mean?"

"Yes," Yodar said, marking each word with a stroke of one finger. "I think I have the answer to our difficulty. Orlando! If we could persuade him to go along, preferably at gun point, the guards would not dare shoot."

"But how?" the Captain demanded.

Suddenly, Higgins pounded a fist into a palm. "There's been too much talk. Action's what we want. This is an old gag, but maybe they've never used it on Fradia. The sick prisoner gag." He bent double, and contorted his face into an expression of intense pain. To make it more real, he stuck a finger down his throat.

What followed would have fooled the cleverest of men, for there was no faking that.

Byrnes ran to the door and began to pound at it with his fist. Presently, a voice demanded they step back and, immediately after, the door opened to let four uniformed guards step in.

"What's wrong?" one of them demanded.

"This man! Can't you see he's ill? Orlando wouldn't want him to die," Yodar said.

"Keep quiet, old fool," the squad

leader ordered. "The three of you march to the wall and face it while I look at this one. Men, keep a close watch on them."

The Earthman was lying with eyes closed, hands clasped over his middle, moving now and then and moaning as he did.

The Fradian bent over the other. "What's wrong?"

"My belly! It's on fire!" Higgins moaned. He rolled so that he was facing the green man.

"Take your damned hands away," the guard said as he put a hand down to touch the other.

"I will," Higgins said. His voice no longer held agony. And before the other could guess Higgins' intention, it was too late.

With a lightning-like move, Higgins reached out and grasped the extended wrist and pulled downward, at the same time rolling inward, thus throwing the green man off balance. In a second, the bubble-gun which had been held loosely by the green man had been transferred to Higgins' right fist. There were four popping sounds. The green men didn't stand a chance....

"**N**OW WE'VE got weapons," the newsman said exultantly. "As I remember, we're just down the corridor from Orlando's room."

"That's right," Yodar said. "But the corridor's lined with guards."

"Let's make that past tense," Higgins suggested. "We open the door and start blasting. How many shells does this thing hold?"

"Ten capsules," Yodar said.

"I used four of mine. So we've got thirty-six left. Well?"

"Let's go," Captain Arndt said. He turned to look at the other two, about-faced to Higgins and started for the corridor.

It might have been another story.

But surprise was on their side. Before the corridor guards could more than register surprise and shout the alarm, they had won through to Orlando's very door. Higgins was the first in.

Lydia Grey was bent backward across the desk, Orlando, his face a mask of sensuous desire, was ripping the clothes from the girl. Already she was bare to the waist, and as he tore, he pressed close to her in his desire, and mouthed her lips with his foul kisses.

He was so lost in his passionate frenzy, he did not even hear the door opening. The first he knew of the four who escaped was when Jack Higgins whirled him away from the girl and crashed a right hand into his mouth, Orlando stumbled backward, spitting blood and teeth. The desk stopped him. And once more Higgins was on the green man. Three times Orlando went down under the hammer blows of the Earthman. And when he didn't come up for the fourth time, Higgins raised his foot to drive his heel into the battered, pulpy face.

"Wait! We need him!" Captain Arndt threw his arms about Higgins and lifted him bodily. "You can finish this upstairs!"

"I'm okay now," Higgins gasped. "Where's Lydia?"

Her hands were crossed before her to cover her nakedness. "I'm all right, darling," she said. She sounded weak. "Mind tossing me your shirt? I might catch cold running around this way."

He unbuttoned his blouse and spread it around her. Her lips puckered for a kiss. "Just one before we try for the outside," she said.

It was the shortest, sweetest kiss he had ever known.

Then, her hands were shoving him away and her voice saying: "I'm all right now. Really I am. But we've wasted enough time. I imagine you've

aroused the whole palace."

Higgins patted her shoulder and moved away to confront Orlando. "We're going to get to the surface," he said as he shoved his face into the bloody one of the green man, "and you're going to help us. And if you've any idea of playing hero, that's all right with me. I'm itching to put one of these air capsules into you."

The green skin became mottled. "No!" Orlando whispered. "You wouldn't."

"Try me and see. Now, all you've got to do is yell to your men to hold their fire. First one lets loose, so do I. Understand?"

"THIS ELEVATOR, like all the others to the surface, can be operated at both ends. If all of us go up, they can stop us from coming down. One of us, and Orlando, will have to stay below."

They listened in taut silence to Yodar. It was a tough problem.

"Might as well be me," Byrnes said. "How about it, Captain Arndt?"

"Well..." the Captain hesitated.

"Higgins can't stay. He's got to give the signal. The girl—"

"All of you go," Yodar broke in. "I'm an old man and I have too little to live for. Orlando is frightened of you, but his real fear is terror of what I could do to him, and will, if he attempts anything at all out of the way. I will guard him well, do not fear."

The men solemnly shook hands with the old man, and just before they stepped into the elevator, Lydia planted a kiss on the smooth green cheeks.

"You'll like the Earth," she said.

JACK HIGGINS was the first one out of the elevator when it returned from the surface with the first huge containers and fifty fighting men on it.

And beside him was Sergeant Byrnes and Captain Arndt. The vast hangar was empty.

"Yodar! Yodar, where are you?" Higgins called.

From beside the huge trapdoor which opened to the cage coming from the ground, came a weak reply: "Here, Earthman. Here..."

"What happened?" Arndt asked, as they bent over the old man.

"Orlando got... away. Shot me. My legs gone... and soon I die. Hurry before it is... too late..."

"How long do we have?" Higgins asked.

"Don't know. Do not delay. Hurry..." the voice faded and died. And as the voice died, so did the rest of him.

"We may not have time," Higgins whirled on the others. "I've got to chance something."

He dashed to the nearest fighting man. "Let me have your fire tank."

The man stared blankly at him.

"Give him the tank," Captain Arndt commanded.

"WHAT SHOULD I tell Lydia?" Captain Arndt asked, as he waited with Higgins for the elevator to come up.

"Tell her I'll be back," Higgins replied, smilingly. The smile faded. "Just tell her I had to do it. I forgot an important thing. There are women and children down here, as well as on our own planet. It wouldn't be right not to try and give them a chance."

"You're a fool, but, a hell of a brave one," Arndt said. "Don't give Orlando a chance. Blast him for all of us."

"I will. Sounds like my boat's in. Well, be seeing you."

Then he was alone in the elevator. Presently, the hum died. The doors opened and the moving platform rolled smoothly before him. He held

the nozzle tightly and stepped onto the platform. It was deserted. He looked down at his feet and saw a faint shadow. A tight smile parted his lips. He knew he and his equipment were invisible; he had hurriedly donned the suit of light-deflecting material at the last minute.

The faint shadow was the only visible sign of his presence.

Years of training had given him a quick sense of direction orientation. The platform moved swiftly forward and, as it moved, Higgins sent quick glances to right and left seeking the enemy. He had forgotten to ask Yodar how long a time had passed since Orlando's escape. But it couldn't have been long.

Then, the huge shape of Orlando's palace came into view, and also an immense army lined up before the palace, and stretching into the distance as far as the eye could see. Higgins' left hand went out to a stop button and pressed it home. The platform stopped with efficient silence. He squeezed the tiny bulb which set his miniature audio into operation.

"Men of Fradja!" his voice boomed out. He was too high up to see their faces, but he knew his voice had reached them. "You can't see me, but I am here nevertheless. I come with a message for the people of Fradja...."

He saw the palace gates swing wide and a second later, Orlando, attended by several score of his personal guards, marched out.

"Don't let Orlando lead you to destruction. Think of your families, your homes, your future. The peoples of the Earth want you to come and live with them in peace. There has been enough of war."

He stopped when he saw several men gather close to Orlando. Immediately after, these men ran forward to the front of the first line of men. He

guessed what their orders were.

"Stop!" his voice reached the farthest ranks. "Watch!"

Flame compressed into a thin stream, flame which could be thrown a thousand yards even from the hand equipment he wore, shot out in an invisible stream toward the palace. The rain of flame struck the solid masonry and melted it instantly. Seconds later, the huge building gave voice to a shriek that was almost human as it began a slow collapse:

"There are a million of us above, ready to come below!" Higgins continued. "I am one man and see what I can do alone, and do without fear of reprisal. Think of what will happen when a million men invade...."

He had seen the men before the palace break and run as the building began to fall, nor was Orlando the last to run. He could also see the solid ranks waver, as if an unheard command had reached their minds. He knew he had to strike again, at least once more.

"Yodar was right! This war is foolish. Throw down your arms, take Orlando prisoner, and peace is yours. Otherwise...."

But Orlando was to have one last say, one last fling. He ran forward as the grey dust of the collapsed building settled, until he was facing his men. His voice came faintly to Higgins: "He is somewhere on the platform above. Shoot him down!"

This time, Higgins aimed the spray directly above the spot where Orlando stood. He had no conception of the tremendous power and scope of the flame thrower. There was no place to run, no place to hide. Invisible flaming death struck in millions of fiery droplets. But as if he was immune to it, Orlando was still upright when Higgins closed the nozzle.

"Now you have seen!" Higgins' voice boomed at them again. "Even

if you kill me, you know now that ten men, men you cannot see, men who have the power to exterminate all of you, can do so without your being able to fight back. And there are a million of them above. You can do nothing to stop them from coming below because they control the vents!"

It was impossible to see the effect of his words; there were too many of them below. He thought quickly. One last demonstration might do the trick. Not more than twenty yards from him was a slanted level leading into the square before the palace. He broke into a run.

PRESENTLY he was on the street, moving forward slowly. Now, he could see the green faces before him, see the indecision and fear on them. But discipline was still strong. Commanding officers were shouting tersely for them to fire into the structure above, and their cumulative orders brought a semblance of military order to the massed ranks. Higgins saw a forest of tube-like weapons raised skyward; and seconds later there was a thunder of sound as the Fradians loosed a barrage against the platform.

The platform vanished for hundreds of feet along its length.

Now, Higgins saw Orlando step forward, his evil face raised up. "That is our answer to their demands," he raised a threatening arm. "Let them come, and even though we can't see them, they will know how useless their invisibility is."

Higgins shuddered at the terrible concerted scream of agony he heard as he loosed another stream of death. He aimed it upward at an angle, and when the fiery drops fell, there was no one to tell the direction from which the fire came.

But he knew he had failed. It was simply impossible to make himself

heard by all. More, there was a limit to the fuel held by his tank. He had to get out and away. But where? Already squads of men had detached themselves from the fore companies and were stealing forward and to the sides, blasting away with their weapons as they came.

Seconds counted now. And Jack Higgins knew he had lost....

Suddenly, thunder filled the air. It was all about him, the vast sound of a voice. It spoke in understandable accents: "Hold, men of Fradia! Hold your fire. You cannot see us and we are all about you...."

And Jack Higgins knew what had happened. The other ships had landed, had found the vents, and now hundreds of tiny two-men ships were flying around up there, probably close to the ceiling. Invisible ships, ships armed with great tanks of the liquid fire, ships capable of exterminating the entire Fradian army, just as he had threatened.

"Surrender or die!" the unseen voice demanded.

Then, Jack saw Orlando. He was in the midst of a group of his officers. The group was moving away from the main body of the troops lined up before the palace, and toward several ships by the side of a building. Like a flash, he was after them. Something told him he had to reach them before they got to the ships. He was only a couple of yards off when the first ship was reached.

Skidding to a halt, he aimed the nozzle at the ship. A second later, it dissipated into nothing under the hail of invisible fire. He knew the men in the ships above had eyes only for the main body of Orlando's army, and would not pay too much attention to the movement of a few men.

He heard the command given by one of the officers to fire in every direction at will. The air became acrid

with the odor of tube fire. But now there were only two ships to get. Then only one.

Suddenly, something struck him. The world fell apart in a million stars, each like a comet trailing a fiery trail. Somehow, he managed through sheer will power to get to his feet. He pressed the nozzle trigger.

Nothing happened.

He realized instantly that the shot which had struck him had hit the tank somewhere and had fused the connection of the metal hose into the nozzle. Had the projectile struck anywhere else, he would have died in a fiery bath. He was alive—but weaponless.

And Orlando and a half dozen of his men were already at the ship.

HE WAS like an invisible human torpedo flying through the air. His wild tackle caught Orlando behind the Fradian's knees and the man fell as though he had been hit by a sledge. Jack could see Orlando's face; it was like something out of Hell.

Orlando's voice screamed; "Get the ship off the ground. Quick..."

Jack's hand strangled the rest.

The officers seemed spellbound by what they saw. Orlando was clutching his throat and kicking helplessly about, as though he were trying to commit suicide by strangling himself. Their eyes widened at what followed. Orlando was lifted straight up in the air, held there for an instant, then dashed to the ground.

It was too much for them. They broke and fled.

And as they fled, so did the nearest group. It became a plague. Company after company found itself embroiled in the same fear. Weapons clattered to the ground; thousands of men stood stock-still with upraised hands. While from above, the metallic voice called directions and order into the chaos below.

But there was one who heard nothing of this. His tongue protruded blackly between purple twisted lips, and his eyeballs seemed to be forced from their sockets. His hands were clutched around his own throat, as if he had strangled himself.

And above the dead figure of Orlando, Jack Higgins stood, an invisible avenging being....

THE END

MORE SCIENCE—MORE FUTURE

by Walt Cain

IT'S quite common today to run into articles deploring the criminal uses to which science has been put—the atomic bomb and all the modern paraphernalia of war is detested. These good moralists would have us declare a moratorium on science for decades to come to prevent Man from destroying himself. They want research to stop until Man catches up in his social and sociological relations to his developments in physical science. Balaam!

The answer to assuring advancement in the future is more science—not less!

It is true that men have perverted the uses of science to war. It is true that science has given man the power to destroy himself. It is true that the social

sciences lag the physical. But you don't progress by stopping progress—of any kind. You don't get angry with the tools and equipment when you make the mistake. Instead you try to learn what's wrong and make the repairs and remedies. So it is with science. The fact that we have misapplied science doesn't mean that science is bad—it means we are. Therefore, stopping research and learning in science is like cutting off your nose to spite your face. Only harm is accomplished.

So when you hear anyone deplore the rapid progress of science and contrast it with the slow progress of politics and ethics—just point out that more science will cure the fault!

MORPHEUS IN HADES!

By E. Bruce Yeches

I WAS STRUCK with the emptiness of the streets and roller-walks. It was early evening and the syntho-dome overhead shimmered and winked. A premonition seemed to be drawing at my thoughts, yet there was no reason for it. I sensed my discontent but I couldn't voice it or tag it. The Machine, I reflected, had made life perfect and none of us had to fear the travails of the radiation-ruined world outside the syntho-dome. True, there seemed to be no drive to life, but the pleasures of narcosis and the Narco-rooms, filled with their extravagant dreams, made up for this lack of need to do things. Everyone took to the Narco-rooms gratefully. And yet I knew it was not right.

I strolled leisurely and aimlessly down a side street away from the Narco-room centers. I knew I should not, because my record required more narcosis, more dreaming, but that seemed so aimless, so futile, that even a walk was a directed action. If this defection were reported to the Central of the Machine, I knew I'd be in trouble. The Watchers would whisk me away in a hurry. And in spite of these fears, I walked on.

"There she is!" I heard the shout, and two Watchers, paramsticks in their hands, dashed from a doorway just in front of me and started in pursuit of someone whose shadowy outline I could see fleeing farther down the street. It seemed to disappear into a building and I could hear the Watchers debating what to do as they paused. They turned and their eyes fell on me.

"You," one shouted, "Come here!"

Ordinarily I would have obeyed them without question, but seemingly without my

conscious volition, a wave of hatred swept over me, and instead of walking toward them, I flung open the door of the building and dashed in. Surprised at my rash action I stared into the gloomy dim-lit murkiness and I could see I was in the lobby of an apartment of some kind. Suddenly realization of my defiance came to me. I could hear the Watchers outside hammering on the door.

I ran down the corridor toward the rear of the building. Strangely, a delicious sense of power pervaded me, countering my first overwhelming fear.

The refugee must have entered this same building farther down the street and I hoped that I'd encounter her. So I turned left and ran down that rectangular corridor. It would be only a matter of minutes before the Watchers gained the building.

I saw a stairwell and dashed down it. It was utterly dark and I almost stumbled and fell when I tripped. My hands shot out to balance me and I clutched something. It was soft and warm and it let out a frightened cry. "Oh!"

I was clutching in my arms the girl the Watchers had been chasing moments ago. She writhed and struggled to break away. I held her firmly.

"Don't," I said, "I'm being chased too. I'm running from the Watchers too." In that moment I knew that I'd never submit to another Narco-session.

She relaxed and I loosened my arms. We walked side by side along the tubular passageway at the bottom of the stairwell. In the light of dim bulbs I could see she was beautiful. There was fright in her eyes—but determination too.

"My name's Alain," she said as we

walked rapidly. "I'm going outside the Syntho-dome. I don't care what's out there. I can't stand the Narcois. I know others have escaped—why can't I?"

"I've heard of passageways outside," I said, "but how will we find them? I won't stay in this rabbit warren any longer."

"They may passageways like this lead to sewers and service and conduit ways which go outside the Syntho-dome. Maybe if we follow this far enough, there will be a way out. No matter what happens I'm going too."

There was such fervor and courage in her voice that I couldn't help but admire her. "We'll find a way together," I said, and I brought myself nearer her side. Her hand crept into mine and we walked rapidly down the unknown corridor to our fate.

"Yes," she agreed and there was the shade of a smile on her face, "we'll find a way together...."



THE CAIN I hadn't been spaceborne for more than an hour when I ran into the girl. I remembered that I hadn't locked my cabin door and it isn't a good idea for an incognito patrolman to leave his belongings where any steward or passenger can wander in and examine them. I dashed down the short corridor to the right-angled axial junction when I gave an "oof!" and the oncoming girl bounced off me into a heap.

"Pardon me," I said stupidly. "I wasn't watching where I was going." I helped the girl to her feet and I could see she was a beauty. This was my chance to be charming—I thought. She'd make a nice dinner companion, although you wouldn't get much eating done. I opened my mouth to start



talking—and it stayed open like a gasping fish out of water.

"Oof!" she said viciously, and for a moment I'd have sworn there was pure hate in her eyes. Before I could recover my aplomb she turned and walked quickly away. I shrugged and silently consoled myself that I was lucky at that. She was really nasty. I had an uneasy feeling that there was something wrong with that girl, though. Long space trips aren't so exciting that you can afford to ignore your fellow passengers. I lit a cigarette and went back to my cabin.

For the next few days I watched for the girl. I found her name was Dell Armand but there were no other vital statistics available. She didn't appear at mess at all.

Then I saw her a second time.

She was walking rapidly toward her cabin and there was a twisted look of pain on her face. Beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead, and it was apparent she was in agony. I noticed also that she

walked with a limp. As I drew abreast of her I asked: "Are you well? Can I help you?"

She shook her head mutely but with a savage abruptness that made me wonder and she hurried on. Then I noticed something else. In the brief glimpse I'd gotten of her eyes I noticed—I thought—a yellowish glint in the pupils. And that meant everything to me. That girl was a *ziller* or my name wasn't Smith! I should know, too, because I'd just come off the Martian patrol where we spent nine tenths of our time tracking down the damned *zillers* and their suppliers. *Zillness* is the System's most savage and insidious drug! This girl was either a peddler or a smuggler and certainly a user.

I moved fast then.

I waited until the girl left her cabin again. It was the work of a minute to force the lock. I searched the room from top to bottom, but there wasn't a trace of *zillness*. The room was clean. Yet I knew something was wrong.

I decided to brazen it out. There was a large clothes rack in one corner of the room. I hid myself behind it, selected a position where I could see the room clearly, and waited. I had a long wait, but finally the girl came into the room. There was that same look of pain on her face that I'd seen before. Ignoring everything, she fumbled into a box in the handbag she was carrying and withdrew a long hypodermic needle. I watched, puzzled. *Zillness* isn't injected—ordinarily it's taken by mouth. She lifted her skirt, exposing an attractive length of thigh. Without hesitation, she gritted her teeth and plunged the needle into her bared skin. In a moment the look of pain left her face.

"And what was the idea of that? *Zillers* don't use needles!"

She whirled and faced me. A little pistol appeared, as if by magic, in her hand and she fired, at the same time dashing for the door. The shot caught me in the arm, but I was after her in a flash. She moved fast and disappeared down the corridor.

She was gone. The red light on the lifeboat locker was glowing and I couldn't force the door against atmospheric pressure. She had taken a lifeboat and was gone, but she couldn't get far.

I went to Control and described the incident. The ship's officers were already aware that a boat had taken off. They immediately sent out pulse messages and I knew the girl would be picked up in a matter of hours. Certainly her confederates would be waiting in space. She was attempting to get to Earth.

Patrol did pick her up and I learned that what I had suspected when she used the hypo was true. It was loaded with novocaine. She was carrying a small tantalum cylinder embedded in her thigh, using a local anesthetic to cut the pain. The cylinder was loaded with *zillness* concentrate!

MAN IS NOT ALONE

By Carter T. Wainwright

THE DEMARCATION line between life and death is astonishingly thin. In complex organisms, of course, it is fairly well pronounced, but at the lower levels of life it is so fine that scientists cannot discriminate between dead and living things. An announcement was made recently which throws further light (or confusion) on the matter. It has been discovered that bacteria which have apparently been killed by ultra-violet light may be revived by exposure to intense amounts of ordinary light!

Kelmer and his associates have started with cultures of colon bacteria, given them severe blasts of ultra-violet light, and determined from the cessation of motion and reproduction that death in the ordinary, regularly accepted, sense had occurred. Then, exposed to light from a powerful tungsten lamp, these dead cells of bacteria

have revived!

No definitive explanation is forthcoming. The scientists, merely cataloging these phenomena, speculate that here may be a clue to the fundamental nature of life and death.

Certainly these researches tend to confirm the famous Archaean theory of spores' being carried to Earth on meteoric matter. If bacteria are so hard to destroy, it is obvious that trips through interstellar space, through light-laden space, cannot have proved too tough for bacteria to survive.

Indirectly this confirms the growing belief that Earth is not the only inhabited spot in the universe. More and more scientists believe now that life is a phenomenon of as universal occurrence as chemical reactions, common elements and scientific laws.

Pipelines

Carry Juice

By L. A. Burt

FEW SIGHTS are more impressive than a line of massive steel towers paralleling a country road and carrying electricity cross-country at a hundred and fifty thousand volts. These are the sinews that knit together the country's industrial muscles. But have you ever realized that you don't see these two towers in cities, where electricity is usually generated? The answer to that one is simple—they run the wires underground.

But when you've got a wire carrying a hundred thousand volts you just don't bury it in the ground. It must be insulated, and there is only one good way to do it—you've got to surround it with oil to prevent its arcing and flashing over. And that's just what is done. The wires are run through special steel pipelines filled with high-pressure oil, the oil serving as insulation, the steel pipeline as both a carrier and a protector.

Before the development of the pipeline-insulator, the cables carrying the high voltages to and from the cities had to be run through large tunnels underground, a process almost as difficult as building a subway, not to mention the expense involved. Under the oil-pipeline system, the installation of cables to generating stations is almost as easy as building an ordinary pipeline. The method is being used more and more all over the world and in many places today no sign at all of overhead conductors and large towers can be seen.



THE DYING PROTEST

By Glen Otis

THE MECHANISM which triggers off an ordinary star into becoming a supernova is now pretty well understood. The energy of a star comes from the familiar helium-hydrogen transformation. When the star has used up all its hydrogen, it simply flares up into a supernova, in a sort of dying protest. It literally explodes into a huge and ferocious energy-releasing apparatus like a gigantic atomic bomb, but on a scale beyond imagination.

Our own Sun is headed for this self-destruction eventually—but that won't happen for some forty odd billion years! No other stars are near enough to us to affect us in any great way even if they should flare into super-novae. The rate at which novae flare into action is also slow. Only about a star or two every three or four centuries goes into this orgy of radiation.

Occasionally, the super-novae will go into a full-fledged explosion which literally spreads itself all over the system. As an example, the present-day Crab Nebula is actually the expanding remains of a super-nova which appeared some nine hundred years ago. In collapsing upon itself, it reacted and flared outward instead, in countless chunks of matter and radiation. Fortunately our Sun isn't as unstable and its nova-time is still far from the present. We needn't worry about our planetary system's being fired!

THE FLYING EGG BEATER

By Russell Newton Roman

"**S**TEAP ON your 'lifter', P'll. Let's take a spin."

"O.K. Just a minute, while I see if the fuel tank's full. Right. It is. Let's go!"

"Brother, this is living. I feel just like a 'boid.'"

"Hey! Not so close. Want to decapitate me with those blades?"

"Sorry, I haven't put in much time on a lifter, you know."

"Just take it easy and you'll be all right. Remember the blades have a twelve-foot radius and act accordingly..."

That conversation is fantasy only as far off as tomorrow. Obviously it concerns one-man helicopters which strap to the body and, while they're not quite here, the Air Force has, today, a one-man helicopter just a little larger than a hypothetical strap-on job—it weighs a mere two hundred pounds!

As long as men have lived they've carried with them the dream of flying, flying like the birds—free and unfettered, not chained in a cabin behind the roaring thousands of horsepower of a jet or a reciprocating engine. Since anti-gravity appears to be a chimera ever unattainable, and since the flapping of wings of a mechanical bird-device is impracticable, the one hope of flying freely lies in the helicopter. Right now this gadget, this "flying windmill", this "flying eggbeater", is proving the answer to a long-lived prayer.

The latest step in this direction is a simple one-man helicopter now being tested for military use. It consists of a light tubular aluminum framework. Three small

wheels—carried at the end of three light struts—serve as landing gear. The operator of the one-man 'copter sits directly over the fuel tank and the control stick. Behind him rises a column which supports the three whirling blades overhead. The blades are 'jet jobs' driven by small jet motors fastened to their ends. Centrifugal force feeds the fuel to them once rotation has started. The whole apparatus weighs a mere two hundred pounds! It is less of a helicopter than a one-man "antigrav".

No other machine can remotely approach the ability of this miniature 'copter in conveying the sense of free flight similar to that of the bird. The operator may spin along the air at a hundred miles per hour or he may 'hover' over a single spot as long as his fuel supply lasts. He can go anywhere under almost any conditions.

The next step is obvious. Further simplification may produce the "strap-on" 'copter mentioned above. This would be, essentially, just a lighter version of the machine already constructed; direct strapping-on would be impracticable because the whirling blades overhead are dangerous and require a supporting framework. But the pilot would, at any rate, be strapped to the machine.

Unfortunately these one-man 'copters are not available to the public. The military are making every effort to exploit the 'copter situation since they've proved their worth in the Korean conflict. But it is only a matter of a few short years before the helicopter is going to be really Big Business!

REPULSION ATTRACTS

By Tom Lynch

HERMANN OBERTH'S unique suggestion that a rocket be propelled in outer space "by the repulsion of electric particles, is causing considerable comment in scientific circles. Oberth has a reputation as a rocket pioneer and his basic work is still of major importance, so his new suggestion is being listened to with some considerable respect. It goes back to some very simple ideas in basic electrical physics.

Oberth proposes that a ship in space be surrounded with a large number of thermocouples which generate a voltage proportional to the amount of heat incident upon them. This heat would come from the Sun. Then, by the suitable feeding of

the voltage to porous electrodes a stream of electrons would be ejected at high velocity (dependent upon the voltage) from the stern of the craft. In this way propulsion would result.

Theoretically the idea is sound. Practically, it is, of course, difficult of realization. But if men once get chemical or atomic rockets into space, the idea may be well worth considering. The energy problem of rockets for interplanetary work has always been insoluble—discounting the hope of the atomic rocket. Any solution—such as this—will receive serious review. An interesting and hopeful aspect is that the exhaust would not be lethal—as with atomic rockets....



TERRAN TREACHERY TRIPS LUNA

By Charles Recour

I THREW the last shovel-full into the aluminum cart and straightened up. I had an intolerable urge to scratch an itch developing on the tip of my nose, but you can't pull your arm out of the sleeve of a tight-cutting stark ill spacesuit. I ignored it—the only thing to do. You can go batty thinking about all the imaginary itches that exist when you're in a "can."

The chronometer said four. I'd been out two hours. That was long enough, especially since the cart was full. I hardly glanced at it; it doesn't take long to get used to crystal-clear diamonds by the hundreds of kilograms—they're as common as coal almost, but they still bring fancy prices; industry eats 'em up. Barrett and I were due to make a kissing this trip and God knows we deserved it. The preceding trip hadn't garnered us ten kilos.

That reminded me. "Hey, Barrett," I called then—use suit-on mike, "I'm comin' in. How about you?" There was no answer. And that was odd, because we're supposed to be on open circuit at all times. The dark side of Luna is no place to fool around.

"Hey, Barrett," I repeated, "if your radio works, use the signal rocket."

No answer. I moved fast. I loaded the tools in the cart on top of the heap of grunting baubles. I made sure the aluminum number scanner was fastened tight and erect. I'd be coming back here and I wanted to find the spot. There were plenty of credits to be taken out of the place yet.

The aluminum was built like an old-fashioned children's wagon. I grabbed the tongue and started for the rocket. It was a good five kilometers away and I couldn't see it from here, because Moon "terrain" isn't exactly smooth. It wasn't too hard going, though. I moved fast, and in a little while I'd covered two kilometers, rounded the rise directly before the ship, and in a minute I could clearly see the sun cylinder of metal, its nose pointed skyward. It lay on a wide flat plain with nothing around it—or was there? Something was moving a half kilo away.

It was Barrett. He too was tugging at the tongue of his cart and he was headed straight for the ship. I called once more into the mike but there was no answer. He didn't look around. It seemed mighty funny to me that a . . . he would go dead. Those things were as faithful as dogs.

An uneasy feeling gripped me. For some reason I sensed everything wasn't all right. I trusted Barrett, but after all I didn't really know him well and we were making a mighty big haul this trip. The nasty thought that he might decide to skitter, leaving me to die, crossed my mind but I didn't want to think it. I had a signal pistol. This would answer my doubts.

I aimed a beautiful red and white flare for "attention" a hundred meters in front of him. I could see him jerk his head as he spotted it. He turned, saw the dot that was me. But instead of waving or stopping, he broke into a run—if you can call the hopping skip of a bounce on the Moon a run—and headed straight for the ship a half kilo away. He dropped the tongue of the cart he was driving.

There was no question about this. The devil was going to take off. He was a half kilo from the ship; I had a full kilo to run. But I was fired with that mad desperation that overtakes anyone when death is at his heels. I no longer ran! I bounced in huge mad leaps, exerting every effort, headless of my pounding heart, of the stifling sweat-filled space suit.

Barrett ran too. But he was a lot heavier and more awkward than I was. He saw that I was gaining. He stopped, turned and whipped a shot from his signal gun at me. My speed prevented me from getting it but the shot was too close for comfort. I fired once, twice, while on the move. That was enough to send him rolling on.

But he had lost precious seconds and my effort was now super-human. I wasn't far away and there was a good chance I'd make the lock at the same time as he. He realized this and stopped. This time he took careful aim. I realized that he'd nail me if I got any closer; it was a matter of only a hundred meters or so. In desperation I snapped two more shots at him.

I was lucky. One of them caught his leg—at least, I *thought* I did. I could see him forget all about shooting. He doubled over and grapsed with frantic haste at his suit.

In minutes I had him aboard—this time trussed like a chicken. He glared at me through sullen eyes but I didn't care. I'd make damned sure next time that I partnered with a friend, not a treacherous Moon-hound!

READER'S PAGE

LONELY... LONELY...

Dear Sir:

Whilst browsing around with nothing to do I came upon one of your publications, FA, and decided to read it to pass the time. Now I find I want to read some more of them, but the trouble is that we can't get science fiction out here, and now when anybody sees one there is a big fight to see who reads it first.

And I wondered if you could insert this letter in your "Reader's Page", hoping that someone might read it and write to me, also, send me a few old magazines that they have read now and again. I am a lonely Argyle, and time lies heavy on our hands while we are so far away from home.

"Would any of your readers be kind to me?"

22276013 L/CPL Fedrick
1st A & S H. H. Q. 35 INF. BDE.
c/o B. A. P. O. No. 1, F. A. R. E. L. F.

Start clearing the space around you, Corporal. Because our readers are not for their generous response.Ed.

WOW!

Dear LES:

Wow! What an issue the October FA was. Again I say, Wow! All the stories were class A type with "Medusa Was A Lady" in front by a head.

I also liked the short "A Handful of Dust" by my favorite "new author" Ivar Jorgensen. I can't see why people can't accept the name Ivar Jorgensen as his real name. After all he can't help what his mother named him.

"You Take the High Road" gave me a little laugh. I enjoyed it very much.

Next comes "Alas Adam" and last "The Laughter of Shire".

Please answer me this: When in a Martian Blue Moon are you going to drop that advertisement about some silly Zodiac tablets and bring back the "Men Behind Fantastic Adventures"? That was one of my favorite features. Don't drop it, please.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for printing my letter in the September issue of FA. Thanks to you I now have two pen-pals. But that doesn't mean I couldn't use more. Come on, you ink-slingers, drop me a line. I'm 13 years old.

If any of your readers have back issues

of S-F mags for sale, let me know or, better yet, send me a price list.

Joel Nydahl

304 West Washington Street
Marquette, Michigan

EVEN IF IT'S ONLY TISSUE PAPER...

Dear Editor:

I've been a steady reader of Sif mags for about two years. Have been able to keep from writing up to now. A while back, after reading "Excalibur and the Atom", I got the urge to write. Now, after reading the Sept. ish of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, I can't hold back any longer.

I wasn't much moved by the first part of the mag, but after reading "Dark Benediction" by Walter M. Miller, Jr., I went off, full blast. Now there's a story that really appealed to me. Some indefinable quality about it made me read it twice in succession. Let's have more like it.

I've been reading all the letters from readers and notice that all seem to have a suggestion or two. My suggestion is, do what you darn well please with the shape, form, or material of the mags.

Print them on tissue paper if you like, but keep up the good quality writing material you frequently put up. More Sturgeons, for instance. I don't care much what these mags are printed on. But what's printed on them makes a difference.

I've picked up a few copies of smaller Science Fiction magazines that looked real neat, felt good, nice edges, good paper and all, but they weren't worth reading.

Here's my rating for the Sept. ish of FA:

- 1st—"Dark Benediction"
- 2nd—"The Terrible Puppets"
- 3rd—"The Catpaw"
- 4th—"Mission Accomplished"
- 5th—"The Secret of John Marsh"

How about printing this letter? You see, I live in a part of this country where you have to go to the next town to find a newsstand. I think I'm the only Sif fan around these parts. I'd like to communicate with other fans from all parts of the world. I'll answer every letter I get. Here's hoping they keep my mailbox full.

Keep up the good work!

Charles Weispfenning
Box 108
Friedonia, North Dakota



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This one won't ...

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CAUGHT RED-HANDED

Dear LES:

I have been an AMAZING and FANTASTIC reader for a number of years, but this is the first time I've ever written to your magazine to comment on your stories.

I write this time because in all the years I've read your stories, the October issue of FANTASTIC, in my opinion, is the best issue you've ever put on the stands.

From the front cover to the back, this is the best. Speaking of the front cover, I say it is excellent, wonderful, the tops in the field of art. For myself I'd like to see more covers like this one. For once the cover illustration bears out the story. I like that.

I'd like to comment, though, on one mistake I found in an illustration on page 34 by Gene Pawcette in the lead story "Medusa Was a Lady". The print under the picture states, "The seeds which Percy threw sprouted immediately into a horrifying monster."

That is wrong. In the story the seeds sprouted into 'grotesque flowers', not 'horrifying monsters'. Whose fault is this?

About this is, I would place the stories in this order for their awards:

(1) "The Laughter of Shiro" by Gerald Vance, Tops—best I've read in a long, long time. Let's have more by Vance.

(2) "Medusa Was a Lady" by William Tenn. Very, very close second.

(3) "Alias Adam" by John McGreevey. Good—wouldn't have minded to be Adam myself. Wow!

(4) "A Handful of Dust" by Ivar Jorgensen. Swell—but too short. Personally, I prefer longer stories. I'm eagerly awaiting Jorgensen's new novel. Print it soon.

(5) "You Take the High Road" by Stephen Marlowe. Fair—this story filled in to make the issue perfect.

I hope you find room to print this letter; if not, well, I got my two bits' worth in anyway. So let's have more issues like this one.

Lewis E. Brakehill
305 First Street
Peoria 6, Illinois

Our fault—you're right! Actually, the seeds which Percy threw sprouted into grotesque flowers which destroyed the horrifying monster.

No power requested than fulfilled. How do you like Jorgensen's new 32,000-word novel? Ed.

A NIGHTMARE FOR TWO

Dear LES:

I just laid down the Oct. ish of FA and decided to write a letter to ye Ed.

First of all, that's some cover by Tibbston. Never heard of him, but at least he's not Robert Gibson Jones. Boy, this guy on the cover, Percy I guess, must really get a kick out of whacking people's or Gorgon's heads off. There he stands, a happy grin on his face, with the late Medusa's head hanging by its snakes.

But all in all, poor Percy got the worst of it. First he is thrown into another universe via the bathtub, where he is grabbed by a bunch of people whose chief interest in life is to cook him over a slow fire or beat his brains out, these being the most popular forms of recreation. Then, for the next 21 pages he fights Monsters, Gorgons, and Olympians.

Finally, after beatin' 'em all, he is looking forward to living happily ever after with his heroine, but if I understand the ending correctly he is now to have his tongue ripped out and is to be cooked over a slow fire by the same happy, fun-loving people I spoke of before.

All the stories were pretty good. "A Handful of Dust" didn't quite suit me. I like weird stories to scare me, which AHOD did not. "You Take the High Road" I liked very much. "Alias Adam" employed a much-used theme but it had a couple of humorous spots like where Adam discovers there is more to the opposite sex than square jaws and raucous voices.

I disagree with the editorial. I don't think Hollywood has produced enough S-F-Fantasy movies to say which theme has become stereotyped. Maybe I'm talking too soon, though. Maybe ye Ed has a spy in Hollywood's inner sanctum reporting every new movie. Could be.

The letter section was interesting. I always enjoy this feature, even though I may not agree with all that's said. I have only one complaint here: it's not long enough.

Say, come to think of it, I've got a bone to pick with either you or Ed. Browne. Whoever is responsible for the discontinuance of "The Men Behind AS & FA", may your dreams be haunted by the seven-headed Scylla! I enjoyed especially Walter M. Miller's autobiography in last month's FA. Let's have more work by him in future issues.

Now, my two bits' worth on what the length of the stories should be. I prefer one 30,000 to 40,000-word novel and four or five short-stories to each issue. Then, say every 3 issues or so, a 70,000 or 75,000-word novel and only two or three short

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stories.

I only have a couple more suggestions to make and I'll leave you alone. One, why can't the subscriber's copies be sent without being all rolled up. This spoils the cover because it leaves two creases that can't be removed; also you have to stack a pile of books on the mag for a day, or so before you can handle it right to read it. Surely it wouldn't involve much difficulty just to mail the mag flat. Second, I enjoy the fact fillers that you have, but I wish you would recontinue Fables from the Future by Lee Owens and make them just that, fiction fillers.

Wayne L. Fehr
3820 Carlisle
Covington, Kentucky

JUST TRIPE!

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading the October issue of FANTASTIC. The only good story out of the mag is "You Take the High Road"; of the rest, all I hope is that I never again set so much as one eye on them, and here are my reasons.

1. "Medusa Was a Lady"—I admit I'm not a genius but even a genius could not find a plot in that bunch of tripe.

2. "A Handful of Dust"—No climax. Don't all stories have climaxes???

3. "The Laughter of Shiru"—I just didn't like the way it ended, it wasn't logical.

4. "Ahas Adam"—This one was a heart-breaker, it started out so strong and then faded out; maybe you cut it too much—it looked to be a good variation on the theme, too.

Always before this my quarter a month brought good entertainment, and in the past I've waited with bated breath to see the contents. And now this. I feel betrayed, please don't do the same thing to your next issue.

Here's hoping you get some more letters like mine so you won't.

Evelyn Catoe
323 Powers Street
New Brunswick, New Jersey

Sorry—but of a flood of letters, not one agrees with you. Anyway, we hope you like this issue better. Ed.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE?

Dear Editor:

Did you ever notice the difference between the letter columns of AS and FA? In AS, most all the letters are first letters to the editor, which believe me can be awfully sickening all the time. Like: "I just picked up the latest issue of AMAZING STORIES. It is the first issue of any science-fiction magazine I have ever read, and I think AS is the best mag on the market, and that this issue is the best issue you ever printed. I have only read one

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don't like Navarre. As an Illustrator, Frank makes a good airplane pilot.
"Alias Adam"—McGreavey—very good. From the blur I thought I'd already read it innumerable times.

Maybe some of the fans could help me out. I need the book "Bride of Frankenstein" by Michael Egremont; and I'd like copies of WONDER TALES, CURIOUS TALES, MARVEL TALES, STRANGE TALES, TERROR TALES, SCOOPS, THRILLS, INC., OUTLANDS, and the issues of FFM with Farley's "Radio" stories. Will buy or trade.

I've a copy of "Dracula's Guest" I'd sell to the highest bidder.

Anybody got foreign aff or Burroughs books for sale?

Also I need issues 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 of the "Burroughs Bulletin", all 3 issues of "The Antorian", the Big Little Book "John Carter of Mars", all 1939-40 issues of "The Funnies", and ERB's "Tarzan and the Tarzan Twins with Jed-Bai-Ja, the Golden Lion."

Eldon K. Everett
Post Office Box 513
Tacoma, Washington

"Medusa Was A Lady" is really pulling in the votes this month. We, too, thought it was one of the more outstanding poems. . . . Ed.

ONE READER TELLS ANOTHER

Dear Editor:

May I ask a simple question about Dr. Carpenter? If the doctor considers science fiction, especially FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, trash, why does he waste his time in reading it? I personally would not waste my time reading your magazine if I did not enjoy it. I have yet to see anyone standing at the corner newsstand ordering anyone to buy FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

In words of one syllable, if they don't like our mag, let them keep their hands off!

I want to tell you how much I enjoyed all of the stories in the December 1951 issue of your magazine.

Thanks for super reading.

Winifred Watters
1332-10th Street, Apartment 8
Modesto, California

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